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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES

OF

A HOUSE-BOAT

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OF
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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES

OF

A HOUSE-BOAT

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

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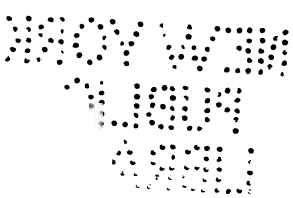


THE STRANGE ADVENTURES
OF
A HOUSE-BOAT

CHAPTER I.

"See! from the bower a form majestic moves,
And, smoothly gliding, shines along the groves;
Say, comes a goddess from the golden spheres?
A goddess comes—or Rosalind appears!"

"AND do choose a nice one this time!" says a small woman, with pleading, soft, brown eyes. "Just fancy those long days and weeks—in far out-of-the-way places: of course I want someone who is very, very pretty, and very, very delightful, to be my companion. Never mind about her being a heroine. Everybody can't be a heroine. I want somebody who will be merry at dinner, and cosy to walk with on the moonlight nights; and I don't care twopence about her character ——"

"What?"

"You know quite well what I mean. I detest strong-minded women—they should all be sitting on School Boards, with spectacles on their noses, like a row of owls. Character! What's the use of character? You can't kiss force of character; but you can kiss Peggy Rosslyn."

"You mean *you* can."

"Well?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a stare. "Isn't that enough?"

"Hm! . . . However, it's Peggy Rosslyn, is it, you've fixed upon? Well, I shouldn't have called her so uncommonly pretty. Let's see. Her eyes—her eyes are rather glassy, aren't they?"

"I think they are most beautiful eyes," says this small creature, warmly. "Why, they have the clear shining blue of the eyes of a child!"

Archive 14 May 1934

"Her nose is distinctly impertinent."

"You may call it impertinent, if you like; but that is merely the stupidity of the English language in not having a word to describe the prettiest shape of nose there is."

"We won't quarrel about her nose; there isn't enough of it to make a fuss about. And indeed if I were granting you everything—that she is fairly good-looking, and has a tall and elegant figure, and a fresh complexion, and so forth—what does it amount to? When you come to her conduct, what are you to say? Why, you know she is a most outrageous and audacious and abominable flirt!"

Queen Tita condescends to smile a little.

"She is a mischievous monkey," she admits. "But it's only her fun."

"Her fun? A nice kind of fun. I call her simply a White Pestilence ——"

"I'll tell her you said so."

"—a White Pestilence, stalking through the land, and scattering devastation wherever she goes."

"And it's little cause you have to complain, in any case," she retorts; for she can shift her ground with dexterity. "No, it isn't for you to complain of Peggy's tricks. Who encourages her? Who is worse than anybody else? Why, the way you two go on is perfectly disgraceful. I declare, if I weren't an angel ——"

"But wait a bit. Who said you weren't an angel? I want to know who said you weren't an angel. Just you pass him this way. Hand him along. And then ask his aged mother to come and see if she can recognise the fragments."

"It's all very well for you to make a joke of it; but if you would only think of those two grown-up boys, and the kind of example that is set before them ——"

"I daresay the boys will be able to look out for themselves."

"If they take after their father, they will."

"Come, now, about Peggy. You know she has a way of expecting a good deal of attention."

"Yes; and men are never willing to pay her all the attention she wants! Oh, no, they are quite reluctant—you especially!

Well, never mind, I'll take Peggy. I daresay we shall get on excellently by ourselves. But remember, Peggy is to be mine, and mine alone. Of course she will share my cabin at night; but I mean in the daytime as well—when we are walking along the bank, Peggy is to be with me; and if we go for a drive anywhere, she and I are to sit together. And won't you men be wild!"

"And won't you women be dull! But I don't know yet that I can allow a person of that kind to come with us. There is a good deal of moral obliquity about your peerless Peggy. Look at the way she goes on at cards. You may call her 'a daughter of the gods, divinely tall,' but you can't say she's 'most divinely fair'; for she cheats at *vingt-et-un* like the very mischief."

"It's only her fun."

"Why, everything is only her fun! Is she to be allowed to do whatever she pleases so long as it amuses her? Besides, there are other considerations. She's a Yank."

"She's a dear!"

Obviously it was of no use to argue further with a woman who would make such irrelevant answers; for the sake of peace and quietness it was better to say, "Very well"; and so it came about that it was resolved to ask Miss Peggy Rosslyn to accompany us when we should be ready to steal away from the busy haunts of men and begin our exploration of the devious water-ways in the west of England.

As it chanced, the Person without a Character—she who had been chosen simply because she was pretty and nice—who was supposed to have no mental or moral attributes whatsoever —no ambitions, opinions, affections, angularities, or sinister designs of any kind—this Characterless Person called upon us that afternoon, and found some people chatting and drinking tea. And oh! so innocent she looked; and so demure were her eyes; and so reserved and courteous and complaisant her manner to these strange folk! Not any one of them, as it happened, had met her; not any one of them had been on terms of intimate friendship with her, and been allowed for a second —for the flashing fifteenth part of a second—to see in those innocent eyes a sudden and laughing confession of all her

villainies and sins. What they saw was a tall, pleasant-looking, young American lady, of about eighteen or nineteen, fresher-complexioned than most of her countrywomen, and thoroughly well dressed. Perhaps one or other of the younger men, regarding her with greater interest, might have observed one of her small peculiarities—the grace of the action of her hands and wrists when she took anything up or put it down. It was a quite unconscious and natural habit she had of keeping her hand turned outward from the wrist, and hovering, as it were, before she touched anything, as a butterfly hovers before it settles. It may be added—without any great breach of confidence—that when Miss Peggy wanted to be very affectionate towards one of her women-friends, or wanted to wheedle her out of something, she had a trick of holding her victim's head in those pretty white hands while she kissed her on both cheeks. A person who has gone through this ceremony several times informs the writer that she cannot think of anything it resembles so much as the soft closing together of a plover's wings when the bird first reaches the ground.

On this occasion it fell to the lot of a distinguished but far from elderly man of science to make himself agreeable to Peggy; and he did his best. He entertained her with an account of the Dodo. The Dodo, he said, was a Conservative bird, that became very much annoyed with the Radical new ways of its contemporaries—the sports of the various species, so to speak, and failing to convince them that they were conducting themselves shamefully, he simply left the world in disgust. That is what we do now with science; we make it entertaining for children. Peggy was a child, and had to be amused. And how could this youthful Professor know, when he was making himself pleasantly facetious, that those calm, inquiring eyes were reading him through and through; that Peggy knew far more about human beings and their arts and wiles and ways than he knew about snails and frogs; and that, while he remained within reach of her glance, he was playing with a fire a hundred times more deadly than any ever invented by the Greeks? However, in these pages there shall be naught set

down in malice against the young lady who was to be our guest and companion during our long water-journey. The truth may have to be told; but it shall be no more than the truth. And it is frankly admitted that on this afternoon Miss Peggy behaved herself very well. She was docile and agreeable to all. She did *not* sit in a corner with any one person for the whole time. As for the youthful Professor, he went away declaring that she was simply charming, though she did not seem to him to resemble the typical American girl; from which we are to learn that sham metaphysics may by accident penetrate even into the sacred domain of science, and that a biologist may confess to a belief in those anæmic abstractions, those impossible phantoms, those fantastic fabrications of prejudice or prepossession—national types.

But when we discovered that Peggy had no engagement for that evening, and when she discovered that we were to be by ourselves, she was easily persuaded to stay and dine with us; and forthwith—for the people had lingered on till nearly seven o'clock—the domineering mite who controls this household had carried her improvised guest away with her, to prepare for the banquet. And indeed when Miss Peggy took her seat at the table, the candid historian is bound to admit—though rather against his will—that she was pleasant to look at. One forgot the audacity of her nose in the general brightness of her face; and her eyes, whatever else they may have been, were distinctly good-humoured. She had a pretty underlip, too—a perfect rosebud in its way; and she had a habit of pursing her mouth piquantly when about to speak: when listening, on the other hand, in an attitude of pleased attention, her head a little forward, sometimes she would part her lips in a half-laughing way, and then there was a gleam of whitest pearl. Yes; simple honesty demands—or rather, extorts—the confession that there have been plainer young women than our Peggy, as she appeared on this evening; and the prospect of having her for a companion during our contemplated excursion was one to be endured.

And now we had to lay all our plans, inchoate as they still were, before our young friend, in the hope of enticing her to go

with us. It was speedily found that very little enticement was necessary. When her hostess described to her our preconcerted and sudden withdrawal from the roar and turmoil and heated rooms of London—the assembling of the small party of friends on board the mysterious barge, as yet unconstructed and unnamed, that was to bear us away toward far western regions—our stealthy gliding through the silent land, in the pleasant May-time of the year—the ever-changing panorama of hill and wood and daisied meadow slowly going by—our morning walks along the banks—our moonlit evenings on deck, with perhaps a little music, of plantation birth—or, later still, a game of cards in the lamp-lit saloon: when all these things and many more have been put before her, the question comes—

"Now, Peggy, what do you say? Will you go with us?"

"Will I?" says Peggy. "Won't I!"

And then she seems to think this answer too abrupt; and she goes round the table and kisses that small mite of a woman.

"You are just too good to me," she says; and then she returns to her place.

"You will bring your banjo, Miss Peggy?" says one of us.

"Oh, no!"

"Why not? Don't you ever perform out of London? Bell took her guitar with her when we drove the Phaeton northward."

"That is different," she says. "A guitar sounds all right. But a banjo would be out of keeping ——"

"Oh, we can't get on without 'Kitty Wells' and 'Carry me back to Tennessee'."

"There is a much more important thing," interposes Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and she eyes the young lady with severe and significant scrutiny. "We shall want a fourth for our party; and he may—I say *he may*—be a man; and even possibly a young man. Now, Peggy, I want to know if you are going to behave yourself?"

Miss Peggy turns to the third member of this trio, with appealing and innocent and injured eyes.

"Now, is that fair? Is that kind? Do I ever misbehave?"

"Never—I will swear it! But I see you know where to come to, you poor dear, when they say things about you. You know where sympathy and consolation are always waiting for you. Don't you mind them—you come to me ——"

"*Who called her a White Pestilence?*" says a hushed small voice.

"What's that?" says Miss Peggy, whose ears are sharp enough.

"Oh, yes; you must bring your banjo," one has to interpolate hastily. "Of course we can't do without 'Kitty Wells,' you know, and 'Carry me back to Tennessee'——"

"*Who called her a White Pestilence?*" says the fiend again.

So this matter has to be faced.

"Well, you understand, Miss Peggy, there are some people whom you have to describe by opposites—the ordinary phrases of approval are not good enough—do you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see," answered Miss Peggy; and there was very little indeed that that young woman was incapable of seeing. "I see that you have been talking about me. But I know you didn't believe half of what you said."

"Of course not!—nor any of it."

"Besides," she continued, "if I go with you on this boating expedition, I shall be under your eyes from morning till night, and you'll see for yourself how good I am. Perhaps you will believe then—and not listen to any stories!"

This last remark was addressed to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who did not answer. She seemed doubtful about the young lady and her behaviour. However, we had booked Miss Rosslyn for that vagrant voyaging by canals and western rivers —that was the main point gained; and as she was pretty—that is, tolerably pretty—and as she had engaging manners, and as she was certified as possessing no character worth speaking about, all promised excellent well.

CHAPTER II.

"One day there chanced into these halls to rove
A joyous youth, who took you at first sight;
Him the wild wave of pleasure hither drove,
Before the sprightly tempest-tossing light;
Certes, he was a most engaging wight,
Of social glee, and wit humane though keen,
Turning the night to day, and day to night;
For him the merry bells had rung, I ween,
If in this nook of quiet, bells had ever been."

THE first difficulty we encountered was to find a suitable name for the noble craft that was to carry us away into those sylvan solitudes. Here are some of the suggestions made to us, and the reasons why we had to decline them :—

Converted Susan. This was the proposal of an ingenious young man who fancied we were going to take an ordinary canal-boat, and adapt it to our present needs; and who intimated that a name of this kind would give a pious air to the undertaking. Of course we refused to sail under false colours.

The Snail. Appropriate, perhaps; but not poetical.

Noah's Ark. Scouted unanimously; we weren't going to have any beasts accompany us.

The Rose of Kentucky. This was a pure piece of sentiment on the part of Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and therefore—and alas! —to be put aside.

The White Swan. This looked more promising; and we even went the length of discussing the decoration of the vessel, and asking whether a little symbolism might not be admissible —say, a golden beak at the prow, or something of the kind.

"Oh! no," says Queen Tita, "I wouldn't have any ornament at all. I would have the boat painted a plain white—a simple plain white, without any scrap of decoration."

"Surely that would be too severe," says the aforementioned youth. "Why, even the old bookworm who sent instructions

to his binder: 'Let back and sides go bare, go bare; but you may gild the top edges if you like'—even he wasn't as strait-laced as that." We knew there never was any such old bookworm; and we resented this flippant treatment of a serious subject.

The *Water Speedwell*, the *Water Vole*, the *White Moth*, the *Velvet Shoe*, the *Phantom*, the *Pholas*, the *Vagary:* all these and a hundred more were examined and rejected; and we were growing desperate, when Miss Peggy Rosslyn, happening to come in one evening, settled the matter in a moment.

"If that is all the trouble," said she, "why not call it the 'Nameless Barge'?"

The Nameless Barge was the very thing we wanted—mysterious, ghost-like, and entirely in keeping with our secret and silent gliding along those solitary highways; and the Nameless Barge we forthwith declared it should be.

Now when we set about the planning and construction of the nondescript floating thing that was to be serviceable on both canals and rivers, we were greatly indebted for advice and assistance to a young friend of ours, who has already been incidentally mentioned. His name was Jack Duncombe; he was the son of a wealthy Manchester merchant, who had sent the lad to Harrow and Cambridge; thereafter the young man came to London to study for the Bar, took rooms in the Temple, ate his dinners, and eventually got called. But it was not the law that filled this young man's head, it was the drama; and he had actually succeeded in getting one small piece produced, which was mercilessly mauled by the critics (of course, a conspiracy to crush aspiring genius). Busy as Jack Duncombe was, however, with plots and characters and epigrams, he found time for a good deal of idling; and as most of his idling was spent on the Thames, and as he was a universal favourite among riverside families during the summer months, he had acquired an intimate knowledge of all kinds of pleasure-boats. Not only that, but he was an exceedingly clever and handy fellow, and of the most indefatigable good nature; and when he heard of this project of ours, he quite naturally assumed that it was his business to procure for us the very vessel we

wanted. Nothing seemed to diminish his unselfish industry and zeal; no obstacle was allowed to stand in his way. Consultations with boat-builders; correspondence with the secretaries of canal companies; laborious comparisons of designs; visits to Lambeth, to Staines, to Kingston;—nothing appeared to come amiss to him. And yet one shudders even now to think of that cold river on a January day—the copper-coloured sun behind the milky clouds—the bitter wind coming over the frozen land and blowing harshly down the stream—the shivering conversation on the icicled gangways—the inspection of this dismal house-boat and that one still dismaller. For surely there is nothing in the world more depressing than the appearance of a dismantled house-boat, shorn of its pretty summer adornments, and standing revealed in all its nakedness of damp-smelling wood, faded paint, and rusty metal-work. But our young dramatist was too much occupied to heed this melancholy contrast; he was busy with such things as the height of the cabin, the depth of keel, the quantity of ballast, the arrangement of the pantry, the construction of the berths; and at length, when all our inquiries were over, the commission was finally given; and it was agreed and undertaken that the Nameless Barge, painted a simple white, with no touch of colour or gilding at all, should be ready and waiting for us at Kingston-on-Thames on May 1, with such stores on board as we might choose to send down beforehand.

Then says the mistress of this household—

"Mr. Duncombe has been so awfully kind and obliging over this affair that we are almost bound to ask him to go with us, if he can".

"You know the certain result. Peggy will make a hash of him within the first dozen hours."

"Oh, no, no; this time she has promised to behave; and indeed I don't think she ever means very serious mischief. Besides, if anything were to happen, where would be the harm? That's what I thought when Peggy was with us at Venice, and Mr. Duncombe wrote saying he might perhaps come round that way. Of course, as we don't know the Rosslyns very well,

it would be awkward if anything were to come about that they disapproved of while she was under our charge; and one can easily understand that people who have been very rich, and have lost nearly all their money, may be anxious that their daughter should marry well. I suppose that is natural. But, you see, we are quite safe with Mr. Duncombe, for he will have plenty; and there can be no other objection—he is clever, good-humoured, light-hearted, a favourite everywhere. I'm sure it is not to bring about a match that I suggested we should take either the one or the other; if they only knew, they would remain as they are—Peggy especially, with all the men her slaves, and people ready to pet her wherever she goes. However, as I say, if anything were to happen, I don't see how the old people could disapprove. I suppose Mr. Duncombe will come into a large fortune."

"You may comfort yourself in one direction. Whatever happens, they won't hold you responsible. They have lived long enough with Miss Peggy to know that she is quite capable of managing her own affairs. She has got a will of her own, has that young woman."

"I can't understand why you always talk in that invidious way about Peggy," she says, in rather an injured tone: "you don't act up to it when she is here."

"Madam, there are such things as the sacred rites of hospitality; and when the representative of a nation allied to us by ties of blood—allied to us by all kinds of things—comes to our shores, of course we receive her as a guest."

"That's all very well," she says. "But we meet plenty of Americans; and yet I don't find you cutting a new pair of kid gloves to pieces when *they* happen to scratch their finger with a needle."

"Where is the chance? You don't suppose that the Americans, as a nation, are continually scratching their fingers on needle points? However, there is this to be said about asking Jack Duncombe to go with us, that he is a particularly handy fellow who will make himself useful. And Miss Peggy can beam on him if she chooses, by way of reward. Jack is used to that kind of favour, people say."

"Accordingly we asked the budding dramatist to accompany us; and nothing loth was he; for he had always plenty of time on his hands, and ideas in his head, that wanted an abundance of leisure for the proper working of them out. And he would not hear of there being any difficulty about getting a factotum for our house-boat, a jack-of-all-trades, able to cook, and look after the cabins, and take a hand at the tiller when needed.

"Why," says Queen Tita, "where are you going to get the Admirable Crichton who can steer a boat, and boil potatoes, and black boots, and also wait at table?"

"Oh, that's all right," the young man said, gaily. "We'll advertise for somebody who has taken Mr. Longfellow's advice, and learned to labour and to wait."

She did not approve of this levity. She said: "I think you'd better write to Mr. Gilbert for the address of the sole survivor of the *Nancy Bell*—the man who was—

> "'The cook and the captain bold,
> And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
> And the bos'un tight, and the midshipmite,
> And the crew of the captain's gig'—

for short of that I don't see how we are to get along".

"I will undertake," says this confident youth, "to get 'not one, but all mankind's epitome'—a person able to sew on buttons, cook the dinner, and drive the horse when the man falls drunk, as he is sure to do. Leave that to me."

And then we told him about Peggy Rosslyn going with us.

"I've heard a great deal about that young lady," said he. "It's odd I've never met her at your house."

"She spent all last winter in Paris," Mrs. Threepenny-bit explains. "And since she has come to England, she has been mostly at Bournemouth, where she has some friends."

"And is she really the adorable angel you all make her out?" he asks, with a certain air of indifference, not to say of incredulity.

"She is a very good girl, and a very nice girl," says Queen Tita, quietly, for she does not like any of her young lady friends to be spoken of in a free-and-easy fashion, especially by young men.

Indeed, the next time Jack Duncombe called to see us, she took occasion to drop a little hint on this subject—in the gentlest possible way, of course. He came in radiant. He had been down to Kingston. The Nameless Barge was nearing completion. He was himself astonished at the amount of accommodation on board, seeing that she had to be constructed so as to enter canal locks and pass under bridges: nay, he was confident of her sea-going qualities, too, when we should have to face the wide waters of the Severn channel. According to him, the project no longer looked merely hopeful: its success was assured. He had discovered how to avoid Birmingham and all similar grimy districts. Our wanderings were to be purely pastoral and peaceful: the Thames, the Severn, the Kennet, the Avon, were to reveal to us their most secret haunts. He promised us that on some still evening—some warm and golden evening—perhaps dying slowly into dusk, and then re-awakening into the splendour and magic of a moonlight night, we should find ourselves moored by a meadow-side, in the dim solitudes of the Forest of Arden.

"Yes," said he, "all you want now is a motto for the great scheme; and I've got that for you too. A motto!—why, it's a prophecy! Would you believe that Virgil clearly foresaw what you were going to do? Oh, yes, he did—he described it in a single phrase—in the Georgics."

"And what is it?" Queen Tita asks.

"'*Mellaque arundineis inferre canalibus*,'" he answers, apparently rather proud of his ingenuity.

"And the translation?" she asks again

"The translation? Oh, that is clear enough. It means: 'To carry Peggy Rosslyn along the reedy canals,'" he answers, as bold as brass.

"Really, now, what a dear, clever old man to have foreseen so much!" she says, drily. And then she adds: "I suppose, now, it was the age of the poet that allowed him to speak in that familiar way. I am afraid that with our younger poets—the poets of our own generation—Peggy will have to be known as Miss Rosslyn."

"Oh, I will treat her respectfully enough, if you mean that," he says, with promptitude.

And yet even in giving this assurance he had somehow the manner of one conversant with the ways of young women, and accustomed to humour them, and manage them, and patronise them. And, no doubt, looking forward to the long excursion before him, and to the companionship of the young American lady of whom he had heard so much, he considered that it would be his duty to pay her some ordinary civility, and generally to look after her, and befriend her, if only as a little bit of amusement. Poor wretch—poor wretch!

CHAPTER III.

"By the rushy fringed bank
Where grow the willow and the osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays."

"THERE'S my dear! There's my pretty one!" cries Queen Titania, as we drive up to Waterloo Station; forthwith one catches sight of a tall young lady, bright-eyed and smiling, coming quickly towards the cab; the next instant the two friends are together on the platform, kissing each other in the wasteful and foolish fashion peculiar to women. To the humble by-stander it is left to regard Miss Peggy's costume, which is quite admirable in its neatness and apparent inexpensiveness; of navy blue serge it is, with the jacket open in front and showing a vest of soft white merino with silver buttons. At present she wears a bonnet and gloves; but we know that she has with her a sailor's hat of cream-white straw; and we hope in due time, on board ship, to teach her the usefulness of bare hands.

The luggage having been looked after, the three of us get into a carriage.

"No, Peggy," says Queen Tita, gravely; "you needn't look round. He isn't here."

"Oh," says Peggy, with reproachful eyes, "as if I wanted anybody but you."

Therewith she takes her friend's hand in both of hers and presses it most affectionately; and then, sidling close to her on the seat, she interlinks their arms, and hugs her tightly, just as if these two were determined to go through the world together, unheeding all the rest of mankind. And as for the third person in this railway-carriage? Oh, his share in the whole performance is to pay. He may have laboured days and nights to get everything in readiness; he may have worn his eyes out in the perusal of Ordnance Survey maps; he may have spent untold gold on tinned meats and biscuits; and now he is of no

more account; he may, if he pleases, buy a penny newspaper, retire into a corner of the carriage, and read the Parliamentary reports. But there is one reflection that cannot escape him: which is, that endearments between women are the foolishest things on the face of this earth. They impose on no one. They afford no possible kind of satisfaction to the recipient of them; and there is not a man alive who does not see that they are a mere hollow pretence.

To return to business: our start, after all, was rather a haphazard affair, because some of our arrangements had broken down at the last moment. For one thing, the factotum of a steward provided by Jack Duncombe proved to be much too astute a person for simple folk like us. Doubtless he knew a great deal more about the Thames and about house-boats than we did; and we were willing, in a measure, to be instructed; but when it came to innumerable conditions and half-hinted stipulations, we had to point out to him, gently but firmly, that we did not at all look upon his going with us in the light of an obligation. Finally, we had politely to request him to betake himself to the outermost edge of Limbo, himself and all his idiotic requirements; and then says Mrs. Threepenny-bit—

"Why, you know who are the only obliging race of people we have ever met! Where do we ever get courtesy and kindness and good-will except in the West Highlands? If I were you I would send right away for Murdoch."

"A Highland steward on the Thames!"

"At all events he will be good-natured, and obliging, and pleasant-mannered. I'd rather have him on board than any of the confectioner-creatures you see at Henley Regatta. And so would you, Peggy, I know; for he is very good-looking, and you could fall back on him if there was no one else."

"Why do you say such things of me?" says our poor injured Peggy.

However, it was there and then resolved to send for Murdoch Maclean of Tobermory, in the island of Mull; who came —sadly bewildered by the size and roar of London—and was at *once sent on to Kingston*. Thither also Jack Duncombe had

gone down; for there was some little trouble about getting a man and horse to tow us up to Oxford—where more permanent arrangements were to be made. Thus it was that we three set forth by ourselves: two of us making ostentatious display of their silly affection for each other; the third driven in self-defence to the invertebrate garrulities of the House of Commons.

As the train slowed into Kingston Station, we perceived a young gentleman eagerly scanning the carriages. He was a straight-limbed, slimly-built young fellow, of pale complexion, with good features, intelligent grey eyes, chestnut-brown hair, and a small brown moustache. He wore a blue jacket, white ducks, and yachting-shoes.

"Peggy," said the elder of the two women, as they stepped out and on to the platform, "let me introduce to you Mr. Duncombe—Miss Rosslyn."

The quick look of surprise that appeared on the young man's face! Had our familiar speaking about Peggy deceived him? Perhaps he was not prepared to find this American young lady so distinguished-looking, and so calm and self-possessed; to say nothing of the observant, direct glance of her clear-shining eyes. Miss Peggy bowed complacently and not unkindly; and the young man, recovering a little from his embarrassment, turned to his hostess and explained that he had a youth below and a barrow for the transference of our luggage, and that he had left Murdoch in charge of the boat. Then these two, the luggage having been carried down, walked on ahead; leaving Miss Peggy to follow with the only companion left her.

"Well?" one says to her, by way of encouragement and inquiry.

She does not care to look up in answer: you would think she was quite interested in the dusty road before her.

"Well?"

And then Miss Peggy slowly raises her eyes, when she has had time to make them quite inscrutable. It is a trick she has when she dares you to read any meaning into them.

"Well?"

"What *is it?*" she says, with the most beautiful innocence

though there is the smallest, faintest curve at the end of her lips that speaks of a dark concealment.

"What do you think of him?"

"Of your friend?" she says, artlessly; and she glances ahead. "Oh, well, I think he is rather good-looking; that is all one can say as yet."

"Miss Peggy, are you going to let him alone?"

Again the plaintive, injured look.

"I didn't think you were going to accuse me of such things, even in fun. You are always kind to me—and—and defending me against everybody. Besides, didn't I tell you you would see for yourself, all the day long, how well I behave?"

"But you mustn't behave too well, Miss Peggy; that would never do; we might begin to think you had some definite kind of a character about you. Don't you know what made that small woman there determined to inveigle you into going with us? It was because you had no angles of character at all; because you were nothing but simply nice."

"Did she say I was nice?" she inquires, with a touch of shyness.

"She did."

"And did you agree with her?" asks this bold hussy—showing what her shyness is worth.

"I? Oh, well, that's asking questions, and too soon. You know what the man said who went off in a balloon by himself; he said, 'This is very nice, *I hope!*' We'll see, Miss Peggy. We'll have a little scrutiny of your conduct before saying anything definite. We'll give you a written warranty afterwards."

"And that is all you trust me?" says Miss Peggy, looking very, very much hurt and aggrieved. "Well, then, I will tell you this: sometimes I imagine it is you who say all those wicked things about me, while professing to be my friend the whole time. I believe it is your wife who is my real friend, and that it is you who put suspicions into her mind. But I will show you how wrong you are. I will just show you how wrong you are. And then, when you are heartily ashamed of *yourself, I hope you* will apologise."

"I will."

At this moment Miss Peggy is regarding those other two in front: a smile begins to hover about her lips; the faintest dimple appears in her cheek; but her eyes are inscrutably grave. She turns towards her companion.

"Yes, he *is* rather good-looking. Don't you think so?" she says.

"You villain!"

No other protest is possible; for here we are down at the river; and there is the long white thing—an elongated Noah's Ark—a white-washed gondola it seems—that is to be our home for many a day. And here is Murdoch come ashore—a sailor-like, sunburned young fellow, who has made himself smart in his steward suit and peaked cap; he is very bashful before the young lady stranger; he waits to be spoken to by Queen Tita, who is an old friend and sea-faring comrade of his.

"Well, Murdoch," says she, "and what do you think of the boat, now you have seen her?"

Murdoch glances towards the Nameless Barge with evident disfavour; but he is too courteous to say anything very disparaging.

"I thought, Mem, it wass to be a yat," he says, still regarding that long white eel of a thing.

"A yacht? Oh, no. We couldn't take a yacht away inland. Why," she says, with a smile, looking at him, "I believe you are quite disappointed!"

"Oh, no, Mem. Maybe it is a good boat for the purpose—maybe it uz. But I would not like for us to be going round Ru Hunish in *that*."

"I dare say not. But she could lie at anchor well enough in the Sound of Ulva, couldn't she? You remember the place, Murdoch?"

There is a quick look of pleasure in Murdoch's clear, dark-blue eyes.

"Ay, indeed, Mem; it wass many's the time we were in there; and a *nice place it* wass to be in, Mem, when the Gometra men *did not forget* to bring us bread from the steamer."

"Murdoch, this is Miss Rosslyn; she is an American young lady, who wants to see all about England, you know; and you'll have to do everything to make her comfortable while she is on board."

"Oh, yes, Mem; but I wish the young leddy wass going with us on a yat, Mem," says Murdoch, rather pathetically: it is clear that he regards our present expedition as a sad falling off from others he has known in former days.

Queen Tita looks at him and laughs a little.

"I do really believe, Murdoch, you are sorry you came south!"

"Oh, no, Mem; indeed not that, Mem," says this bashful-eyed young fellow (who would scarcely even look Peggy's way). "I am sure I do not care what kind of a boat it uz, if you will ask me to go, Mem; and it's ferry glad I am to be going with you, Mem, whateffer the kind of boat."

It was a pretty speech, in intention, and may have helped to put that sprat of a creature into an amiable frame of mind. At all events, when we got the two women bundled on board, disappointment was not the mood in which they took possession of their new quarters. They were simply delighted with everything; could not express their admiration of all the cunning little arrangements; must needs ransack the pantry, and overhaul the cooking apparatus; were astonished at the convenience and snugness of the berths; and then, when it was intimated to them that the saloon forward, when not required for meals, was to be their own especial boudoir, into which meaner members of the company might occasionally be admitted on invitation, you should have seen how naturally Queen Tita began to roll up the red silk blinds of the small windows, so as to let plenty of light in, and Miss Peggy, taking her banjo from its case, at once found a hook where it could hang.

"We must get some flowers for the table," said Miss Peggy.

"God grant I have no need of *thee!*" remarked her friend, addressing the waterproof that she was folding up for stowage in the rack.

They were at home at once. They sat down opposite each other, to admire all the cheap Tottenham-court-road finery

around them—the Utrecht velvet cushions, the mirrors, the sconces, and what not; and they had no word of complaint against the character of the decoration.

"Well, I do think this is very comfortable," says the elder of them.

"I call it perfectly charming," says the younger.

"I am sure we are very much obliged to Mr. Duncombe—where is he?" And then she cries: "Why, I declare, we're moving!"

There could be no doubt of the fact; for a glance out at the forward window showed that we were being towed across the river by a small boat pulled by two men. And of course the women must needs see the start; and as that forward window was found to open on to a space of deck at the bow, they had no difficulty in getting out there, and commanding an excellent view of all that was going on.

Where was Jack Duncombe all this time? Why, he was steering. He was responsible for all the arrangements of our setting-forth; and his air was serious, not to say important. He had neither word nor look for the women-folk; and they, of course, knew better than to talk to the man at the wheel. They humbly looked on as he got the boat close to the bank, and, springing ashore, proceeded to get ready the towing-line. The horse, adorned with bows of ribbon, was there, waiting; so was the driver. We should start in a minute at furthest.

But alas! for our assiduous and serious-eyed young friend. No sooner is the line attached than the gaily-decorated steed appears to think he ought to do something; and what he does is far from what we want him to do. He proceeds to dance around on his hind legs, scattering the small boys who have assembled, and paying no heed at all to the man, who clings desperately to his head. It is a humiliating spectacle—a beast pawing the air in that fashion, as if he were imitating a bear at a show. Our women-folk are too ashamed to laugh; but Mr. Duncombe, no doubt, assumes that they are laughing, and very angry he becomes.

"Wo! you confounded beast! Come down, you brute!"

And then he says to the man: "What did your master mean by sending us a fool of a horse like this? We're not going to take a circus through the country. This is a nice sort of creature for a canal tow-path!"

Then, amid these gambols, *crack!* goes something.

"Look here, now!" our young friend calls to the driver, who is still hanging on to the animal's head. "Here is this thing broken! You'll have to go back. Take this kangaroo home, and bring us a horse. Get away, you idiot!"

This last ejaculation is caused by his having to skip aside from the lively pair of heels—an undignified movement at the best. The driver, a tall young man, gaunt of face, clad in a suit of pilot cloth, and wearing a skipper's hat—we called him Palinurus the moment we set eyes on him—proceeds to unhitch the rope from the broken harness; and then, in a melancholy manner, leads away the disgraced, beribboned prancer. Jack Duncombe comes on board. The women don't say anything. He pretends that all is not quite ready for our departure. He consults Murdoch about the stowage of the portmanteaus; and then these two disappear within the Noah's Ark. The women's faces remain demure.

And yet we made a sufficiently pleasant start, after all, when a second horse—a large-boned white animal, with bushy mane and tail—was brought along and yoked; and glad enough were we when the vibration of the long, tight line and the swishing of water at the bows told us we were really off. It was a cheerful morning, too; for if there was no positive sunlight, there was a white glare of heat; the birds were twittering everywhere; the swallows skimming and darting over the surface of the silver-rippling river. Of course this was rather a well-known panorama that was now gliding silently by—the Surbiton villas among their abundant gardens, with here and there a boating party embarking, and here and there a rose-red sunshade visible under the young green of the trees; and, indeed, some of us may have been wishing that we could get the Thames part of our voyage over and done with, and set forth upon less familiar waters. But this we had to remember, that with us was a young American

stranger, to whom everything was new, who had an eager interest in places with historical associations, and who was most amiably disposed to be pleased with everything she saw. Hampton Court was not at all "'Appy 'Ampton" for our Miss Peggy; it was the palace that Cardinal Wolsey gave to Henry VIII.; and she seemed surprised that we did not propose to stop at a place enriched with so many memories.

"Well," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in the midst of our learned discourse, "I am going inside to talk to Murdoch about lunch. You," she says, to the humble chronicler of these events, "you can stay here and entertain Peggy with English history. History—yes—that's what they call it."

"What does she mean?" says Peggy, with artless eyes.

But just as if to rebuke the malignant levity of women—who think of nothing but their own wretched little gibes and jeers among the serious cares and duties of life—not more than a minute after that we found ourselves out in the middle of the river Thames, helplessly adrift, and with no visible means of reaching either shore. For at Hampton Court the tow-path changes to the Surrey side; Palinurus had unhitched the line without leaving sufficient way on the boat to enable us to shoot the bridge; we had no oars; and the two poles we had on board could not reach the bottom. This was a pleasant predicament; and yet here was one woman looking on in mild amusement at our frantic efforts to save her worthless life; and the other woman, rejoicing, no doubt, in the feeble sarcasm with which she took her leave, busy with such inanities as plovers' eggs and pigeon-pie. By what superhuman endeavours we got that boat over to the other shore needs not to be described here; we found Palinurus peacefully, if furtively, smoking his pipe; and Coriolanus—why we called him Coriolanus we never could make out; but it seemed natural somehow—Coriolanus was nibbling at the grass on the bank. Presently, the line had been attached again, and our silent progress resumed; and then, when we had disposed of the rough-and-tumble business of getting through Moulsey Lock, a silver tinkling was heard within, which we knew to be Murdoch's summons to lunch; and Miss

Peggy, forsaking history—yes, history—for the moment, was pleased to descend from her commanding position at the prow, and take her place at the oblong little table in the saloon.

Now this was the first occasion on which those two young people had really been thrown into each other's society; and it may be said at once that Queen Tita's fears, if she had ever seriously entertained any, ought to have been dissipated forthwith. Miss Peggy took not the least notice of the young man; she did not even look his way; you would have thought she was not aware of his existence. You see, she was much interested in hearing about Cardinal Wolsey's gold and silver plate, and his more than regal hospitalities; and she was very curious about the gentlewomen who now occupy rooms in Hampton Court Palace, and wanted to know all about their circumstances and ways of life. As for Jack Duncombe, he devoted himself entirely to his hostess; and of course he talked of nothing but this blessed boat.

"Well, you know," he was saying, "we must make little mistakes sometimes; an excursion of this kind can't be done right off the reel. If it had been quite easy to do, everybody would have done it. And, besides, this isn't the least like an ordinary house-boat. The ordinary house-boat, as you know, is a great big unwieldy thing, with a square stem; you don't go voyages in her; you contract to get her moved for you, when you want her moved; and then you take down your party of friends, and have sky-larkings. I suppose the builder fancied those boat-hooks would be long enough for all practical purposes; but wait till we get to Staines, and then I'll look about for a right sort of pole. We live and learn. If the people at Hampton Court thought us duffers, they were welcome. We got the boat across, anyway."

"Oh, but you mustn't apologise," she says, kindly. "I'm sure our start has been most successful. And I'm sure, too, that Miss Rosslyn will be delighted with our English scenery, just when it is at its freshest and brightest."

Miss Rosslyn was engaged at the moment—with history.

"It will be far more interesting," the young man said, "when

we get away into the unknown districts. It will be the most solitary expedition you can imagine. You know, the railways have in many places bought up the canals; and these are almost disused now; if we only can get along, it will be the loneliest trip you ever tried. I hope we are all very good-natured."

"Peggy," she says suddenly, "are you very good-natured?"

Peggy looks up, startled.

"No, thank you; I won't have anything more," she says.

And then—not noticing the fiendish grin on the face of the woman who pretends to be her friend—Miss Peggy continues—

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!—and the delicious silence—you can't tell how you are going—it feels like a kind of enchantment. That window," she says, regarding the larger one at the bow, "has just the proportions of an upright landscape; and if you sit where I am, you see simply a succession of Corots—those tall poplars, and the glassy stream, and the white sky. I could not have imagined anything so delightful. It is like being wafted through the air ——"

"If you've all finished," says Jack Duncombe—to whom Miss Peggy's remarks were *not* addressed—"I'll take a turn at the tiller, and let Murdoch come in to clear away."

So we left the women to the enjoyment of their Corots—or to helping Murdoch, as they felt inclined, and betook ourselves to cigars and steering astern.

Well, it was pleasant enough: the gentle motion; the silence—save for the thrushes and blackbirds; the suffused sunlight; the cool swish of the water along the boat; the gliding by of the placid English landscape, green with the verdure of the opening summer. And perhaps we enjoyed this luxurious idleness all the more that we knew there were harder days ahead of us—days of fighting with low bridges, and opening and closing untended locks; days of distant wanderings and privation, perhaps of anxious responsibility and care. At present our duties were mostly confined to taking a turn at the helm; for as the steersman had to stand on an improvised thwart in order to see over the roof of the house—with his arms supported by the iron stanchions meant for an awning—

that spread-eagle attitude could not be maintained for any great length of time. Of course, we ought to have had gear arranged by which the boat could have been steered from the forward deck; but we could not think of everything at the last moment; besides, why should the occupants of the saloon have their Corots spoiled for them by the interposition of a man's legs?

But if our adventure at Hampton Court was unfortunate, our escapade at Shepperton was entirely lamentable and ignominious. Here the tow-path shifts to the Middlesex side, and the horse has to cross by ferry; and here, once more, Palinurus detaching the rope prematurely, we were left helpless in mid-stream, with a strong current carrying us down. Now, a man may use a boat-hook as an oar, even as he may use a walking-stick in place of an umbrella; but neither will avail him much; accordingly, we found ourselves drifting broadside on to an island.

"Kott pless me!" we heard Murdoch muttering to himself as he was vainly endeavouring to reach the bottom with one of these sticks, "what iss to be done with a boat like *thus?*"

Then a man comes running along the bank.

"Throw us a line, guv'nor!"

Jack Duncombe, who is at the bow, coils up the towing-rope, and heaves it, just getting it ashore. The next instant our opportune friend (his soul no doubt exultant with hopes of a shilling and subsequent beer) has got the line looped round his shoulders; gradually he gets a little way on the boat; Murdoch has to take the tiller again; and in this humiliating fashion we gain entrance to Shepperton Lock.

That was a beautiful afternoon, still and calm and summer-like, up by Chertsey Mead and Laleham. There was not a breath of wind to ruffle the smooth-flowing river; and the perfect reflections of the trees and bushes—in warm hues of yellow-green and olive—were only disturbed when the towing-line dipped and hit the surface into a shimmering silver-white. It was a peaceful landscape; very English-looking; in the distance there was a low line of wooded hill, with here and there a church-spire appearing among the trees.

"Really," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as we are getting into Penton Hook Lock—"really I am quite ashamed to see so much of the work upon Mr. Duncombe's shoulders. He never gets a moment's rest."

"He likes it. He is proud of his position as sailing-master."

She turns to Miss Peggy.

"Peggy," she says, "you might at least go and talk to him while he is at the tiller."

"I don't know Mr. Duncombe," says Miss Peggy, looking down; "I'm sure he would rather have you go and talk to him."

"And leave you two to get back to your English history—is that what you want? Well, anyway, I have to go and see if Murdoch is making preparations for dinner."

"You'd better leave Murdoch alone," it is here interposed. "He has had his hands pretty full all day; don't bother him about dinner now."

"Are we to starve?"

"It would do you good, once in a while."

"I like to hear men talk like that! We know what goes on at their clubs, don't we, Peggy? Yes, and at the dinners of the City Companies, and the Mansion House, and the Royal Academy—why, everything, anything, is an excuse for the most wasteful extravagance. However, there's one thing: if there is to be no dinner, it isn't Peggy and I who will suffer the most. We shan't complain; shall we, Peggy?"

"I don't know," says Peggy, irresolutely.

"If you would only wait a moment," says the person whose sole business in life seems now to be pulling out eighteenpences to pay successive lock-keepers, "I would explain. We shall get up to Staines about half-past seven or eight; and we must go ashore to buy a proper pole. Very well; we can dine at the old Pack-Horse before coming on board again; and save a heap of trouble. Now do you understand? Can your diminutive intellect grasp that situation?"

"It would have been so nice to have dined on board," she says

"You will get plenty of dining on board before we have done with you. Wait till you find yourself in the Forest of Arden."

"I suppose travellers must be content," she says, humbly; and then she turns to Miss Peggy. "Well, if you won't go and talk to Mr. Duncombe, I will. I am sure we should all be very much obliged to him."

It was nearer eight than half-past seven when we reached Staines, and found a safe mooring for the Nameless Barge. The labours and experiences of this our first day were over, and we went ashore in a placid frame of mind. The twilight was darkening to dusk now; but the thrushes and blackbirds were still piping everywhere.

Dinner ordered at the old familiar Pack-Horse, one or two of us went out on to the little balcony overlooking the river. The evening was very still. There was a curious metallic grey on the surface of the stream; and as we stood regarding it, a single bronze-hued boat went noiselessly by, floating down with the current; and in the stern of the boat, sitting very close together, were two young people, who might have been ghosts gliding through the mysterious gloom.

"Doesn't it remind you of those nights in Venice?" says Miss Peggy, rather absently.

And then, behold! far above the darkness of the trees, there is the young moon, of a pale silver, in the lilac-tinted skies; and in the closing down of the night the birds are still calling.

CHAPTER IV.

"Marie, have you forgotten yet
The loving barter that we made?
The rings we changed, the suns that set,
The woods fulfilled with sun and shade?
The fountains that were musical
By many an ancient trysting-tree—
Marie, have you forgotten all?
Do you remember, love Marie?"

IT is early morning—calm and clear; a pale sunlight lies over the green landscape; the masses of foliage are mirrored on the smooth waters of the stream. There is quietude on board this gently-gliding boat; for Jack Duncombe has gone ashore to walk with the driver; Murdoch is in the pantry; the two women are also within; and the helmsman, left solitary at his post, has little to do but listen to the universal singing of the birds, and also to look out for shallows.

But the quietude is suddenly broken; a woman appears—a small woman—apparently half inclined to laugh, and yet as fierce as a bantam.

"And what do you think of yourself now?" she says.

"I am pretty well, I thank you," is the properly civil answer to this polite inquiry.

"Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"But I am."

"Why do you do it, then?"

"Do what?"

"Oh, of course you don't know how you were going on last night—both of you. In all my life I never saw two human beings make such an exhibition of themselves. I wish you could have seen yourself, and her too"—continues this wildly imaginative and wholly unveracious person, whose testimony the kind reader of these pages will doubtless estimate at its proper value—"the underhand talking, eyes fixed on eyes, the

sniggering at small jokes that no one else was allowed to hear. And then the pretty dear must give you that little bouquet of pansies; and, of course, you couldn't pin it on for yourself—oh, no, a man's fingers are so clumsy; and, of course, she must lean over to do it for you, and be about half-an-hour in doing it—I wish someone had knocked your two heads together. Then comes out the cigar-cutter—oh, yes, she saw it in Paris, and thought the combination of silver and gold rather pretty, and had your initials engraved on it; and, of course, you can't be behindhand when it is a question of love-gifts; you go and give her the silver penholder you have had for years, and that you promised to Edward ——"

"What!"

"The boy would have prized it, and treasured it all his life; and that minx will throw it away, or give it to the first young numskull she finds in her train. I do wonder that men will make such idiots of themselves—for nothing but a pretty face. A smooth cheek and a pair of baby eyes—that's enough. That's all that's wanted; and they seem to be knocked silly, and are ready to believe anything. Why, if you only knew! Don't you see that she is merely playing you off against Mr. Duncombe? It's all done to pique him. That's the way she begins. All these secret confidences—and the attention she pays to your slightest word—and all her unblushing coquetry—that is all done to tantalise him. That cigar-cutter; she has had it ever since she came over from Paris; why did she wait till last night before giving it to you in that marked way?"

"I suppose young ladies have a right to open their portmanteaus when they please?"

"At all events, you needn't encourage her in her mischief. Oh, I saw your tricks! That's a very pretty one you've taught her of looking into each other's eyes while you're clinking wine-glasses. Pledging friendship, I suppose! Friendship! And then that stupid old conundrum—What kind of weather represents an animal? Rain, dear!—of course you asked her that, *just to be allowed* to call her dear. I could see what was going on ——"

"Doubtless!"

"—although I had to talk to Mr. Duncombe all the time. And mark my words, as soon as she has provoked Mr. Duncombe into paying her attention—as soon as she has got him in a fair way of becoming her slave—I wonder where you will be! Where will be all her devotion, and her flattering smiles, and her make-believe gratitude, and her ready laughing at the most ridiculous jokes; where will all that be—then?"

"Where, indeed! With the snows of yesteryear. But in the meantime, while Heaven vouchsafes such mercies, one mustn't throw them away, don't you see?"

"Heaven! It's very little you know about Peggy Rosslyn if you think that Heaven has anything to do with her."

Just as this atrocious sentiment (which will reveal to young men what the friendship of women, as between themselves, is worth) has been uttered, there is suddenly heard the tinkling of a banjo within the saloon—a careless strumming, apparently to test the strings. Then we hear a girl's voice, also quite careless; and we can just make out something about—

"My old Kentucky home far away".

The next instant the door opens, and Miss Peggy, without her banjo, but radiant and fresh as a wild rose in June, and smiling content with herself and all the world, comes out into the daylight.

"I wish I had brought some more strings from home; they're better than those you get in England ——"

Suddenly Miss Peggy stops, and glances from one to the other. She is a sharp-eyed young woman.

"What is it?" she says, looking puzzled.

And then—well, the writer of these lines hardly hopes to be believed, but this is actually what happens—the woman who has been talking so abominably about this girl-friend of hers hesitates for but a second; perhaps there is a kind of fascination in the fresh young face, or a mute appeal in the puzzled eyes; at all events, she goes quickly forward, and laughs a little, and draws Peggy's arm within her own, and forthwith makes use of these *words*.

"Peggy, dear, I'm going to tell you a secret. Be warned by me, and have nothing to do with men. They're perfidious, every one of them. If you only knew their selfishness, and the way they laugh at any trust you may be so foolish as to put in them! Now, women do try to be honest with each other. You may expect a woman's affection and friendship to last, for a while at least; but a man's—never! They'll simply amuse themselves with you—for the moment—and pass on. That's the way with *men*."

Now, as there was only one man present (who scorned to notice these taunts), it was but natural that Peggy should turn to him; and there was more than interrogation in her eyes. There was a great deal more than interrogation in those remarkably shrewd and intelligent eyes. There was—but never mind. She was a discreet young creature, and held her tongue; and she pretended to be grateful for this disinterested advice; and found something the matter with her friend's neckerchief, so that, in putting it straight, she could stroke and pet her a little. For a perfectly Characterless Person, Miss Peggy had ways.

Then says the smaller of the two women:

"Look here, Peggy, no one seems to take any notice of Mr. Duncombe, though he is working so hard for us. He has been quite by himself ever since breakfast. What do you say—shall we go ashore and walk with him for a bit?"

"Please, I want to be shown how to steer," says Peggy, timidly.

"And consider this, Miss Peggy," observes the third person present, "you'll be coming to Runnymede very soon ——"

"Not the real Runnymede!" she says, quickly.

"The actual and veritable meadow where the barons met; and you'll see the place where King John waited on the other side; and the island between, where Magna Charta was signed."

"Now Heaven grant me patience, for they're at their English history again!" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, apparently to herself; and then she opens the door behind her, and calls: "Here, Murdoch, come and get ready the gangboard; I'm going ashore".

And she did go ashore, uttering the while covert gibes and *eers the unworthy nature* of which will be made manifest directly.

For when Miss Peggy had been shown how to cling gracefully to the iron bar, and how to move the tiller with her bronze-slippered mite of a foot, the conversation took quite an unexpected turn, and had nothing to do with English history.

"Now, that we're quite alone," said Peggy, "I wish you would tell me something. I've often thought of asking you; I think you could tell me as well as anyone."

"What is it, then?"

"Well, I want to know if books are like real life."

This was an amazing question.

"It is to be hoped that real life isn't like some books," one answers, trying to escape.

"I don't mean that," she says; "I mean generally. Do you think books represent things as ordinary people find them? Do you think you would find in the actual world around you people capable of so much self-sacrifice, and so much kindness to the weak and poor; and men doing heroic things for the sake of the love of a woman—I don't mean fighting and bloodshed, but constancy in time of trial, and so on? Don't you think that in the real world money is more important than they make it out to be in books? You know quite well that there are people who will frankly tell you their opinion, at least, that money is everything, and romance and love and all that mere moonshine. Now, if you take this case, if you suppose a young man engaged to a girl,—or as good as engaged; the two families taking it almost for granted—and if he seems inclined to throw her over because it turns out she has not as much money as he expected —or none at all, let us say—you would consider that he was only doing what was right, and prudent, and usual, what everyone else would do in his place? People would call him sensible, and say he was quite right, wouldn't they?"

Now, the writer of these pages has been studying men and women for a goodly number of years; and has managed to get considerably befogged, especially about women; but surely it needs no very profound knowledge of human nature to perceive that this young lady, while seemingly concerned about the sincerity *of literature*, was in reality thinking of one

particular young man. And of course no one could be expected to offer an opinion in such a delicate affair, especially on such insufficient data. It was a good deal safer to tackle the general question. And it was easy to point out to this ingenuous young creature that no single human being's estimate of the world at large was of much value to any other human being. You form your opinion from a certain limited number of friends and acquaintances, who are mostly of your own choosing; that contracted sphere you have in a great measure made up for yourself. And like draws to like. "The world," said Mr. Thackeray, "is a mirror in which each man sees the reflection of his own face." It was especially pointed out to this meek disciple that she should not seek for any such information as she desired from a person born and brought up in a country whose ballads and songs and tales and family histories seemed to show that there human life, and more particularly matrimonial alliances, had not always been conducted on strictly commercial principles. On these and other weighty themes the discourse is going on pleasantly enough; Miss Peggy's clear blue eyes are grown somewhat pensive; and the bronze-slippered foot is idly swaying the tiller, when all of a sudden there is a grating sound—a ghastly sound too easily recognised—a hurried yell is sent forward to Palinurus—there is a still harsher sound, and a terrible vibration of the boat—the straining line hauls her over—and just as Miss Peggy and her companion are wondering what is going to "give" first, the towing-rope is slackened, and we find the Nameless Barge fixed firmly on a long and shelving shallow, nearly opposite Magna Charta island.

"Oh, Miss Peggy, what will they say of you now?"

Miss Peggy flushes quickly, and yet there is a half-hidden laugh in her eyes.

"I know what your wife will say; but it wasn't so, was it? Really I wasn't looking ——"

"Certainly you weren't."

"Well, why didn't you tell me that shallow place was *there?*"

"Why did you run the bow into the bank?"

"Oh, here they come; we shall have to face it somehow."

I suppose it is a very amusing thing for two grinning idiots to stand on the bank of a stream, and mock at people who have got into trouble. "How about Robert Fitz-Walter? Where did King John go after the Charter was signed?" one of them kept asking; and that feeble sort of sarcasm seemed to give her great delight. The worst of it was that we in the boat tried our very hardest to get her shoved off, and without avail; and Murdoch, by the expression of his face, seemed to say he was more than ever convinced that this mongrel craft was fit for neither land nor water. In the end Coriolanus had to be brought back; the towing-line was hitched on astern; and in this ignominious fashion we were dragged off the shoal. When we resumed our voyage, Miss Peggy and her companion had neither word nor look for the people ashore. They were welcome to their thin facetiousness. Two souls, always congenial, seemed to be drawn more and more to each other by having had to pass through the valley of humiliation; and Peggy, relinquishing the tiller, went and got her banjo, and came and ensconced herself in the stern-sheets, and began to sing "The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home". She had a pretty contralto voice, of pure and sympathetic quality; and she sang low and softly, for of course we did not choose that those two people ashore should overhear.

Then Peggy—Miss Peggy, I mean—sang "Sweet Belle Mahone"; and then she sang "Hard Times come again no more"; and then she sang "The Little Old Log-Cabin in the Lane". And all the while the water was rippling at the prow of the boat; and the summer-green landscape went gliding by in the happy silence; envy, spite, and jealousy were far away (walking along the bank, that is), and here were peace and content, and the communion of two kindred souls.

"Peggy, will you put down your banjo for a moment and come up here?"

She does as she is bid; for she is an obedient lass, when there is no *one by* to provoke her or frighten her. And this

that she has been summoned to see—the spectral grey thing rising high over the wide rich-foliaged landscape? That spectral grey thing is the stately pile of Windsor Castle; and at the Round Tower floats the Royal Standard of England.

"Do you know what that means, Miss Peggy? The Queen is there just now."

"What," she says, "actually there—living in that building?"

"Undoubtedly."

She is silent for a moment or two.

"Well," she says, "I suppose you can't understand how strange that is to me. I dare say it's nothing to you. You see the Queen driving past in her carriage; and you read about her in the newspapers. But to us at home—to an American girl at least—the Queen of England seems to belong to a long line of Kings and Queens; to be one of a series of historical characters that one has read about so much; well, I can't explain it to you; but it does seem odd to think that she's only a woman, after all, and living over there in that house."

"They say you are rather fond of English history?"

Let no man think that he can catch Miss Peggy unawares. There is a flash of a laugh in her eyes, but only for a second; the next instant she lets herself down into the stern-sheets and demurely takes up her banjo again.

"They may say so if they like," she says, as she strikes the first "whirr" across the strings. "But you must not say anything of that kind. For you always defend me."

It was at the entrance to Windsor Home Park, where we were charged ninepence for permission to pass along this portion of the river (to the young Republican mind there seemed something very incongruous in this transaction, but no more incongruous than the costume of the Royal gate-keeper, who was in his shirt-sleeves, and wore a tall hat with gold braid round it), it was at this point that Mrs. Threepenny-bit and her companion came on board again; and very anxious was the former to ascertain what Miss Peggy had been talking about *when we ran aground* opposite Magna Charta island.

"Oh! well," said Peggy, evasively, "a lot of things. And one can't learn to steer all at once. Besides, who would have expected the water to be so shallow?"

"Oh! but I must tell you this," said Jack Duncombe, with some eagerness, "that shoal is well known to everybody familiar with the Thames. It is one of the worst on the river. And, of course, you couldn't be expected to know, Miss Rosslyn; it was simply a piece of bad luck that you happened to be steering at the time."

Miss Rosslyn looked rather pleased that he should have come so warmly to her assistance; but she did not say anything.

So on we went towards Eton College—the old red and grey building looking as picturesque as ever among its abundant elms and willows and chestnuts; we got through Romney Lock with a moderate amount of bumping; and then we halted for lunch by the side of a long breakwater, where we found a serviceable post. It is true that we also found a notice warning any boat or barge of the awful consequences that would ensue if it moored by "this Cobler"; but then we had no idea what a Cobler was.

"Very well," said our young dramatist, with an oracular air; "a thing of which you are entirely ignorant has for you no existence; and surely for mooring to a thing that has no existence, you can't reasonably be prosecuted."

We had no time to stay and consider this proposition; for we were all desperately hungry; and Murdoch had done his best for us.

Now during this repast—which was enjoyable enough, for the day was fine and clear and still; the stream was scarcely heard in the prevailing silence; and we seemed to be quite alone in the world, though one could catch a glimpse, through certain of the windows, of a few riverside cottages; while far away and above these rose the ethereal grey mass of Windsor Castle, with the gorgeously-coloured standard floating idly in the summer air—during this meal it was impossible to avoid imagining that our young friend the dramatist was trying to

show off a little. At any time he was a merry youth, light-hearted, clever-tongued, with a kind of half-cynical dryness that gave his not too recondite quips and jokes a certain flavour; but on this occasion he was more than ordinarily facetious. Not only that, but he revealed to us plans for further intellectual display sufficient to make one's blood run cold.

"Yes," said he, cheerfully; "that's what I do when I'm having a quiet walk along the bank. I'm working hard all the time. I'm storing up observations, reflections, aphorisms, all kinds of things; and I'm going to jot them down; and I'll read them out to you; and you're all to give me a frank opinion, and say whether any of them are likely to be of any use."

"Fancy having aphorisms read to us after dinner!" said one of us, who was rather aghast at the prospect. "The novel-heroine of former days had no scruple at all in opening her little book, and reading out her 'thoughts'; and the public didn't object; for at that time nearly everybody kept a diary, and was rather proud of turning out neat little bits of wisdom, cut and dried. But a diary—in these times ——"

"Oh, that isn't what I mean," he said. "My profound observations on human life and character are all to come in in dialogue."

"But dialogue must arise naturally from the circumstances, or else it will be artificial; or, what is worse, it will be suspected of being so."

"Invent the circumstances to suit," observed this intrepid young man.

"Perhaps," suggested Queen Tita, apparently without guile, "Mr. Duncombe would show us some of these materials, and then we should understand?"

"Of course I will!" said he, frankly. "There's no unnecessary modesty about me. I really invite you to say 'rubbish' if you think they are rubbish. On the other hand, you might give me valuable hints as to how to bring them in—either in a play or in a story. I'm willing to learn."

He laid down his knife and fork, and took out and opened a small memorandum-book.

"Here, for example, is what appears to me a reasonable suggestion. "Londoners should be taxed at a higher rate than any other community in the country, because they get so much food for nothing. The living organisms in the water they drink are supplied to them quite recklessly, and free of cost. Why should other cities be less favoured?' Now, don't you call that dialogue arising out of the circumstances? You are walking by the side of the Thames; you think of the destination of the water, and its quality."

"It would be awfully difficult to represent the Thames on the stage," observed Queen Tita, anxious to help the budding Shakespeare. "Even if you had real water, the people would not know it was the Thames."

"But I should put that in a story—in the dialogue, don't you know."

"Yes," said one of us; "and have the public turn round and rend you for making faces at it. Come; let's have another one."

"Very well," said he. "How about this?—'The wisdom of children is wonderful—when they are your own children: other people's children don't seem quite so wise'."

"Why, you would insult every mother in the country!" exclaimed Queen Tita. "Every one of them would think the remark addressed to her."

"It won't do? Well, out it goes. I'm not proud. The interests of the British public before anything; and I won't offer them articles that haven't been approved and passed," he continued, quite good-naturedly. "How's this, then?—'At Christmas-time Providence must be rather puzzled as to how all those millions of wishes for happiness and prosperity during the coming year are to be met. How can the supply meet the demand?'"

"Mr. Duncombe," she said, but quite gently, "I don't think it will serve your turn with anybody to be profane."

He snapped the book together and took up his knife and fork.

"No," said he, "no one has any luck with criticism except after dinner. Then people are inclined to be complaisant. That was why, when the public dined at midday, the players

opened the theatres in the afternoon; when the public took to dining in the afternoon, the theatres were opened in the evening; and now, when the public dine in the evening, the theatres open at night. I am very much obliged to you for your kind criticism; but the next time I try it will be at a much later hour."

He took his present failure with a light heart; and why? Simply because he had successfully established a scheme by which he could show off at any moment he pleased before these two women-folk. Young men are always recollecting clever things they might have said to girls, and bitterly regretting that their wit was not alert enough when the occasion was there. But here was a young man who could spend all his leisure time in constructing these sparkling and ingenious "might-have-beens"; and who had also invented a crafty device for displaying them. The interests of the British public, indeed! Materials for dramas and plays, forsooth! What he really wanted was to flash those intellectual jewels before the eyes of Peggy Rosslyn, who had taken no notice of him since we had started on this trip. Very well; young people have curious ways; but there was one dispassionate observer on board, who was of opinion that Miss Peggy's eyes would take a good deal of dazzling before her brain became confused; while as for her heart—but, perhaps, a person certified as being without a character had no heart at all.

Windsor is hated by bargemen, because of the long interruption of the towing-path, which necessitates a tedious poling performance, and also because of the depth of the stream; and this hatred is not unreasonable, as we innocents were soon to discover. We sent Coriolanus and his driver along to the Brocas meadows, and then set about getting the boat thither too. But not even the long pole we had purchased at Staines was of any use here; and once more we found ourselves helpless in the middle of the river, unable to reach the bottom with any of our sticks, and driven to a feeble form of paddling, producing but the smallest effect.

"What uz the use of a boat without oars?" says Murdoch, gloomily, to Mr. Duncombe, when he is quite sure "the *mustress" is out of* hearing,

"Well, you're quite right, Murdoch," the young man answers. "We must buy a pair of oars at Oxford."

"And what uz the use of a pair of oars if there's no place to work them?"

This seems an awkward dilemma.

"We'll have to invent a place, that's all."

However, there happened to be a light wind blowing up stream; and the Nameless Barge had a sufficiently large surface exposed to it; so that, what with this favouring breeze, and the vigorous use of poles and sticks, we did get her along to the Brocas, where Coriolanus was again attached, and our gentle and silent progress resumed.

All the four of us were now in the stern together—one perched aloft and steering—as we stole along, on this quiet afternoon, by Boveney Lock and Surly Hall and Oakley Court, looking at the placid landscape, and listening to the salmon-reel cry of the corn-crake, the kurrooing of the wood-pigeons, and the soft and distant note of the cuckoo. And perhaps it was our being brought together in this way, and cut off from the rest of the world, as it were, that made our sentimental Mrs. Threepenny-bit think of far other scenes.

"It's very pretty, you know," she says, glancing along the bank; "oh, yes, it's very pretty; and I could understand people in time becoming very fond of the quietude of it. But, sometimes—well, one can't help it—you begin to wish you were away in places you have a stronger affection for ——" Here she suddenly takes her friend's hand. "Oh, Peggy, if only we had you with us now in the Sound of Ulva, or in Loch-na-Keal!"

"But as I can't be there, I'm very glad to be here," says our practical Peggy. "Why, I think it most delightful! And the places are so interesting too. Did the Vicar of Bray really live there?"

At Maidenhead we had some excellent exercise before dinner; for here again the towing-path is interrupted for a considerable distance, and we had to shove our Noah's Ark along by means of the sticks. The water, however, is of less depth here than *at Windsor*, so that we had little difficulty in getting

her under the bridge and over to the Berkshire side. Then came the rough-and-tumble of Boulter's Lock; after which we found ourselves gliding silently along under the hanging woods of Cleveden. The shades of evening were stealing over the landscape now; but there was a golden touch appearing here and there among the western clouds, and we had vague hopes of a clear sky at night.

By the time we had got through the lock at Cookham and poled across to the riverside inn there, the dusk had fallen, and orange rays of light from the windows of the comfortable-looking hostelry shot through underneath the ancient yews. A good-natured boatman guided us to convenient moorings—which seemed to be just outside somebody's garden, for we were embedded among bushes and overarched by tall trees; and then we began to light our lamps and candles, and to draw together the tiny red window-curtains, while Miss Peggy helped to lay the cloth for dinner. Jack Duncombe slung a bottle of wine over the side to cool; Mrs. Threepenny-bit apportioned the napkin rings we were to retain during the voyage; and so forth; and presently Murdoch's welcome appearance summoned us to our seats.

Now, when four people are dining together, nothing is easier than to keep the conversation general; but when you have a young man who is rather anxious to be brilliant, and who nevertheless will constantly address his hostess, evidently expecting the other two to listen, then, perhaps, the other two may be driven in self-defence to talk by themselves. Moreover, when you have two and two talking, courtesy demands that you should not speak loudly, for you might annoy your neighbours. Besides that, Miss Peggy was telling her immediate companion of her experiences of camping-out; that is to say, she had not been camping-out, but certain of her young gentlemen friends had been, in the Adirondacks, while she and her mamma were staying at the Sagamore Hotel, on Lake George; and there were certain stories and adventures to relate which might have been misinterpreted by the vulgar mind. Miss Peggy's eyes *said more than her* words when she was challenged to make

confession. And it is to be imagined that the presence of one young lady—of rather attractive appearance, and just a little bit inclined to be mischievous—amongst those idling young men did not tend much to the cultivation of a generous good-fellowship. She herself, of course, gave quite a different reason for the breaking up of the camp. She said the young men were simply crowded out. It appears that they used to have occasional afternoon receptions, to which they invited such neighbours as were within reasonable distance, giving them what little refreshment was procurable. But these festivities proved popular; neighbours invited neighbours; all sorts of people came unasked; and the climax was reached when one tall native of the wilds was overheard to say to another stranger: "Be them nuts free?" That was Miss Peggy's story of the breaking up of the camp; but there may have been other reasons for those young men forsaking their forest life, and going sadly away back to their homes in Brooklyn and New York. One could only guess; for Miss Peggy's eyes, though they tell a good deal, don't tell everything. As for certain other admissions she made—well, they were in the nature of confidences, and therefore cannot, and shall *not*, be set down here.

In the midst of all this, Queen Tita is heard to exclaim—

"Well, I declare! Look where he has hung that cigar-cutter! That is a pretty kind of thing to wear at one's watch-chain as a charm!"

"Madam," observes the owner of the article in question, "for once you are right. It is a very pretty kind of thing to wear as a charm. But supposing it were not, what then? Have you lived all these years without discovering this—that it is not the character of the gift but the intention of the giver that is of importance: isn't that so, Miss Peggy?"

"Why, of course it is!" says Miss Peggy, boldly, but with her eyes cast down.

"Oh, indeed," she says, turning to the girl. "And you? I suppose you will have that silver pencil-case mounted and made into a brooch?"

Peggy *looks* up, laughing, but defiant.

"Why not? I think it would do very well, and be such a new idea. Why, the British jeweller's imagination never gets beyond a butterfly or a horse-shoe. You should see Tiffany's. And then the dressmakers are all for making you so square-shouldered now-a-days; an oblong brooch at your neck would suit very well."

Mrs. Tom-tit, cowed, baffled, jumped-upon, outstared, exterminated, can only turn and say to her companion, with a sigh of resignation:

"Did you ever hear such brazen impudence?"

"I am afraid you goaded Miss Rosslyn into it," he says, with a smile which is meant to carry peacemaking all round the little board.

Well, we sat late after dinner; for everything was very snug and comfortable; and two and two make excellent companionship. Of course, that arrangement did not always exist; for occasionally Jack Duncombe, with a humility we had never before seen him exhibit, addressed Miss Rosslyn direct; and always she listened to him attentively, and with grave and courteous eyes. We sat so late that some suggestion that had been made about *vingt-et-un* was dropped by common consent; and, instead of card-playing, it was proposed that, before turning in, we should have a look at the world outside. The forward window of the saloon was opened; and we stepped forth from the yellow glare of the lamps and candles into the strange silence and darkness without.

It seemed silent and dark for no more than a second or so. For the young moon was shining in the pale violet skies; and we could faintly see the surface of the river; and if the hush of the night seemed to have fallen over the sleeping land, there was a murmur of water in the distance, and close by, in the bushes, a sedge-warbler was singing shrill and clear. And even Queen Tita forgot to wish that she was far away in Ulva's Sound.

CHAPTER V.

"Ah! my dear love, why do you sleep thus long,
When meeter were that you should now awake
T' wait the coming of your joyous make,
And hearken to the birds' love-learned song,
The dewy leaves among?
For they of joy and pleasance to you sing,
That all the woods them answer, and their echo ring."

WAS it that same unholy fowl—the sedge-warbler—that woke some of us next morning, when as yet the dawn was dim in the eastern heavens? The world looked strange at this early hour. There was a ghostly, half-lurid light on the rippling stream; and the night still lingered in the skies, drawing her robes regretfully around her as she slowly left. And what did this beast of a bird say? Why, as plain as plain could be: "Early, early, early!—time to get up! time to get up!—early, early, rise!—time to get up! time to get up!" We cursed him by all his gods, and went to sleep again.

When, much later on, the two women-folk came into the saloon to breakfast, it appeared that they, too, had suffered; indeed, Miss Peggy, though she looked as fresh as a sweet-briar rose, had an odd expression in her eyes, as though the broken dreams and visions of the night had left some bewilderment in the still blue deeps.

"Did you ever hear such an animal!" Queen Tita exclaims. "And then, I was without my sleep-producer ——"

"What is that?" our young dramatist promptly inquires.

"Oh, well, I used to suffer a good deal from sleeplessness, about five or six in the morning; and I found the best thing was to sip a little lemon-juice and soda-water, and lie down again. Indeed, I always have it ready when I'm at home, though I seldom have to use it now. Every night, I see that it is there—the lemon-juice in a tumbler, the bottle of soda-water, and *even a corkscrew* ——"

"Not necessarily for insertion, but as a guarantee of good faith," murmurs the young man.

"And the mere consciousness that it is there," she continues, not heeding his flippancy, "seems to be enough. But I never expected to be woke up in the middle of the night in a quiet place like this."

"Oh, you shouldn't say anything against the sedge-warbler," Jack Duncombe protests. "Don't you know he is the most conscientious of all the birds? He knows that it is his business to pipe; and he goes on piping, morning or evening, until he is dead beat or until he falls asleep. You just try this now: when he stops at night, you throw a stone into the bush, to awaken him; and off he'll go again, piping away for dear life. It's a fact."

"If I threw a stone into the bush, it wouldn't be with that intention," says Mrs. Tom-tit, savagely; and Miss Peggy laughs.

The country between Cookham and Great Marlow, as many people are aware, is one of the most beautiful stretches on the Thames: on the one hand lush meadows, thick-starred with daisies, dandelions, and buttercups, or blush-tinted with patches of the cuckoo-flower; on the other, upland slopes, hanging with beech and wych-elm. And on this silver-clear morning everything looked cool and fresh and bright; there was a light wind ruffling the surface of the river; and there was a half-veiled sunlight touching the upper foliage of the woods, and lying with a broader cheerfulness on the daisied fields. And in all this wide landscape, shining in the soft green of the early summer, one could now make out but four figures; two of these were Palinurus and his four-footed charge, close at hand; the other two were a couple of young people, who were a good distance ahead, although one or other of them occasionally stooped to pick a wild flower. Well, who could grudge them this pleasant stroll together? Youth naturally goes with May and flower-starred pastures and the freshness of the morning; it seemed fitting to the time and place that these two should be walking *along the* bank there, by the side of the smoothly-flowing stream. *It is true that there* was on board a demon of a woman who

professed to find in this harmless companionship a confirmation of her own sinister prophecies.

"Ah," said she, when, at Cookham, Jack Duncombe had made bold to ask our Peggy whether she would care to walk on ahead for a bit, and when Miss Rosslyn had graciously assented and gone ashore for the purpose—"ah, I told you: who is in favour now?"

"Go away," answers the man at the wheel.

"What is the value now of all her flattery, and her love-gifts, and her secret confidences? He was just a little bit too indifferent; and Peggy can't stand that. She'll have it out with him now. She'll teach him his proper place. And where will you be?"

"Go away."

"Well, she will be caught herself some day, I suppose. But I don't know. Men make such fools of themselves whenever they come near her—just because of her pretty face and her pretty figure—that she can hardly help laughing at them. Mr. Duncombe has been proof so far—because he never had a chance; you took care he shouldn't have a chance. But Peggy will give him a chance; oh, yes, she can always manage that."

"Will you get away, and stop chattering about that girl? Is there no other subject on this luckless earth that you can talk about?"

"I wonder who talks about her most! I wonder who is always making extraordinary discoveries about her character!"

"How can that be, when you declare she hasn't any?"

Apparently this is a dilemma; but, as usual, she escapes.

"I don't know that the discoveries are worth much. No. How could a man understand Peggy? It isn't possible. Either he is in love with her, or he is jealous of somebody else being in love with her; and either way he is blinded, and the girl never gets a fair judgment. Now, a woman sees dispassionately what Peggy really is; and I will tell you this, she isn't in the least like what men imagine her to be."

"Peace, fiend; and listen! Men take her as God made her, with all the fascination naturally born of beauty, and with all the glamour *naturally* cast by a pair of eyes that are not only pretty

but also exceedingly amiable and good-humoured; whereas women—who escape the fascination and miss the glamour—think they know her better because they can subject her to their spiteful dissection. But answer me this, Mrs. Farthing-Mephistopheles: which is the real fire-fly—the insect that flashes through the summer night, dazzling you with its splendour, or the insect that you've stuck a pin through and put on card-board and into a glass case? Which is the real fire-fly? I tell you that a woman's dissection of a woman is worth just nothing at all. Women weren't meant for women, to begin with; it is but natural they should be blind to a fascination and a glamour that are sufficiently obvious to other folk. And now, to conclude, dearly-beloved brethren, and to end for ever this fruitless exhortation, it is to be observed that here and there on this unhappy planet there are men who are woman-minded, and who think it is the real fire-fly that they have got fixed on card-board."

"At all events," she says, "it's nicer of you to call Peggy a fire-fly than to call her a White Pestilence; and I'm glad you're not in a rage with her for having gone away and forsaken you. You bear it very well. Your pretence of good-natured approval is very well done. But I know you just hate him at this minute; and I shouldn't wonder if you hinted to him that his returning to London at the end of the week would improve his chances at the Bar."

"His chances at the Bar! His chances of getting a farce produced at the Strand theatre, you mean. However, will you be so kind as to remove yourself from my presence, and go away and tell Murdoch to come to the tiller, for I have to hunt out some Ordnance Survey maps. Who else is likely to take any trouble about them?"

Now the business of tracing out with red ink, on an Ordnance map, our future route by canals and rivers is not a very engrossing one; and so, as the door of the saloon is fully open on this fresh-scented morning, one easily overhears the following conversation.

Queen Tita is in the stern-sheets with her sewing. Murdoch *is on the steering-board*, with his foot on the tiller.

"And what do you think of England, Murdoch?"

"Oh, it uz a peautiful country, Mem; chist peautiful, with ahl the fine grazing land. I'm sure it uz that meks the English people so rich that they come up in their yats and take ahl the shootings and forests and the salmon-fishings. I hef not seen a bit of bad land anywhere; and there's no rocks, or peat-bogs, or hulls ——"

"But don't you miss the hills, Murdoch?" she interposes. "Do you know, I am afraid we have rather disappointed you."

"Oh, no, Mem; you must not be for saying that, Mem. If I hef any disappointment, it wass for you yourself, Mem, bekass I thought you were coming north in a yat."

"Well, we have been in some strange places, Murdoch, in the old days."

"Yes, indeed, Mem."

"Do you remember going away from Isle Ornsay by moonlight?"

"I did not like that night, Mem. There wass two rings round the moon."

"What a place that was to be caught in by the equinoctials! —do you remember the seventy fathoms of anchor-chain? And do you remember the night we flew through Scalpa Sound, with the red of the port light shining on the foam—why, it was like seething jam!"

"Ay, that wass a bad night, too, Mem."

"Do you remember the long, long time we took to get back from Loch Maddy—how many days was it?—a dead calm almost all the time—nothing but blue hills and blue skies and a sea like glass. Why, in a short time they will be having those wonderful nights when there is no darkness all the night through. Wouldn't the people here be glad to be able to play lawn-tennis till eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, Mem. But I wass thinking now, Mem, of ahl the places we used to feesit in the yat, there wass none you liked so well as Polterriv opposite Iona, and the anchorage in the Sound of Ulva, and Bunessan—ay, and Isle Ornsay, too ——"

"*Oh, I love them* all! I'm not going to make any com-

parisons. I wasn't born in your country, Murdoch; but whenever I think of it, and of the people, my heart warms to both it and them; and I would rather spend a week there, yacht or no yacht, than have a year's holiday anywhere else in the world."

This is an extremely elegant and appropriate kind of conversation to be overheard at one of the very prettiest spots on the Thames—these two weeping together by the waters of Babylon, as they remembered Zion. Why, when one steps forth again into the outer world, and looks around, it is to wonder what any human being can wish for more. Over there, on the Berkshire side, and rising steep and sheer from the river's edge, are the Quarry Woods, the young foliage all shimmering in the sunlight; just under them the deep olive-green of the reflections on the water is broken by silver-flashing ripples; and above and beyond certain willowy islands in mid-channel one catches a glimpse of the spire of Marlow church and a bit of red-tiled roof. A more pleasant-looking landscape —in water-colour—one could not desire: why should Madame Ingratitude sigh for the sombre solitudes of the north, and the magic of moonlight nights at sea?

At Marlow Lock our young people were good enough to come on board again; for we had to get the boat past the little town by means of our sticks; and it must be said for Jack Duncombe that he was always at hand when there was any hard work to be done. As for Miss Peggy, she comes through the saloon, opens the window, and is pleased to join the solitary person at the bow.

"I hope you have enjoyed your morning walk, Miss Peggy."

She looks up quickly—to be on the alert against any possible sarcasm; and then, seeing that no harm is meant, she says—

"He's rather nice, you know".

"Indeed."

"Oh, yes, he's rather nice, if he wouldn't try to be so clever. Indeed, he reminds me of some of our young fellows at home, *who* rather tire you by their determination to be funny. I *hardly expected* it in an Englishman. I thought Englishmen

were so satisfied with themselves that they wouldn't take the trouble to try to produce any effect on a stranger."

"That depends on the stranger—on her age and the colour of her eyes, and a lot of things."

"I hope he hasn't been making a fool of me," she says, looking at the little nosegay she holds in her hands. "You see I am very anxious to know what were Shakespeare's wild-flowers; and we've got the names pretty well mixed on our side—I know that what we call the cowslip in Long Island is really the marsh-marigold; then we've got no primroses in America, nor ivy, nor heather, no, nor hawthorn, I believe; and I want to know what the flowers are that your English poets mention ——"

"But, look here, Miss Peggy, the poets are most dangerous guides to follow, especially as regards the seasons of the wild-flowers. You will wander about a long time before you find a bank whereon the wild thyme blows, along with oxlips and musk-roses and eglantine. Milton called for a heap of impossibilities to strew on the grave of Lycidas; indeed, it never was Buckinghamshire that Milton looked at—it was a very literary sort of landscape he had around him ——"

"I don't mean that," she says, without ceremony; "I want to know what were really the flowers that Perdita had in her lap or her basket, whichever it was; and what were the daisies pied and violets blue that Rosalind sings about in the forest scene ——"

"By virtue of stage-licence only."

"This is the real English daisy, then?" she says, examining her little nosegay again.

"Undoubtedly."

"And this is the cuckoo-flower?"

"The cuckoo-flower, or lady's smock, whichever you please."

"I think I can trust you better than him—for he would say anything," continues Miss Peggy. "And I am going to get you to tell me the names of all the wild-flowers as we go along—all that are mentioned in Shakespeare, I mean; and this is a small mark of gratitude in advance—if you will wear it, and if

I can find a pin—and if anyone asks you where you got the nosegay, you must just say it dropped from the clouds."

By this time we had resumed our silent voyage through the wide-stretching meadows that were all shining in the light of this clear May day. The world seemed very empty somehow. We met no one on the river; perhaps it was too early in the year for many boating-parties to be abroad. The only interruptions to our placid progress were the ferries and the locks; and we were now grown quite proficient in getting the boat across the stream, and rather enjoyed the hard work. As for the locks, the people there were far from being sulky toll-takers; they seemed rather to welcome the sight of strangers in these solitary parts, and more than once brought our women-folk a few flowers from their trimly-kept gardens. Miss Peggy, while the boat was being got through, was generally on shore, where she betrayed not the least hesitation in speaking to anyone, man woman, or child, that chanced to be about.

At what precise spot we stopped for luncheon it would be hard to say; but it was somewhere between Hurley Mill and Medmenham; we merely chose the prettiest stretch of meadow we could see—where there were some pollard willows close to the stream—and ran the boat in there and made her fast. We had all the freedom and remoteness and landscape surroundings of a picnic; but also we had comfortable seats to sit on, and the unmistakable convenience of a table. Jack Duncombe, who had steered all the way from Marlow, on coming into the saloon appeared to be a little surprised that Miss Peggy should have given away the rustic posy he had helped her to gather; but it is wholesome for young men to be taught lessons.

It was during this leisurely meal that Mr. Duncombe (who, in the morning, had been telling Miss Peggy something of his pursuits and experiences and hopes) incidentally fell foul of dramatic critics and criticism, and proceeded to entertain us with a furious onslaught on both. Why, if criticism were the contemptible and inefficient thing he declared it to be, he took the trouble to be angry about it we did not wholly *understand.* He maintained that the function of profes-

sional criticism had become obsolete; that the public had no time to listen to the myriad contradictory voices of newspapers, magazines, and reviews; that the fortunes of a play or a book were made at the dinner-table, at afternoon tea, in the smoking-room of a club. He half-heartedly admitted that there was something to be said in favour of the trade or profession of criticism as a means of providing food for a certain number of people who, themselves incapable of producing anything, were content to live by passing opinions on the work of others; but he insisted that it was a mean and parasitical occupation, and the fruits of it absolutely useless to, and disregarded by, the public. With much more of the like sort. The cruel fate of the luckless little comedy was being sternly avenged. The first-night mercenaries, as he called them, were being torn and rended in royal fashion. And when it was pointed out to him, by one who had but little interest in the subject, and who in any case was at the moment inclined to be generally complaisant (through wearing of a certain nosegay), when it was pointed out to him that after all critics were, though the fact has been doubted, human beings; that they can bear a grudge; that, in a measure, they hang together ("Wish they did!" said he); and that, therefore, the solitary dramatist who seeks to fight them is a fool, and will suffer for his pains, he would have none of it.

"Oh, don't you suppose that I am one of the wretched creatures who shake and shudder when they hear a critic come crashing through the jungle. Not a bit! I may stand aside for a moment, but I'll have a shot at the beast all the same before he has gone far."

And then again he said (having been interrupted by his hostess asking him to open a bottle of soda-water)—

"If I were writing a book, shouldn't I like to lay traps for them, to expose their ignorance! I'd have a boat land on the north side of the Thames, in Kent. I'd have a Gloucester yeoman die intestate, and his freeholds go to his youngest son. I'd use all kinds of phrases that they'd gird at as Scotticisms, and then *I'd smash them* with Chaucer and Shakespeare. Why,

I believe Shakespeare did lay traps for the scurrilous idiots who were always attacking him. Giving a seaport to Bohemia was a trap. I've no doubt he knew quite well that at one time Bohemia had seaports on the Adriatic; and I daresay he had his laugh over the ignorant objectors of his own day. But, you see, he can't have it out with the ignorant objectors of our day, because he's dead."

"He is," said Queen Titania, calmly; and this ended the discourse; for we saw through the windows that Palinurus had made his appearance—old Pal, we had now got to call him, affectionately—along with the ample-maned and bushy-tailed white charger that had grown so familiar a feature in these breezy spring landscapes.

As we go on again, by Medmenham, and towards Hambledon Lock, Miss Peggy is up at the bow, and she is talking, in rather a low voice, and with downcast eyes. There are reasons why she does not wish to be overheard: Jack Duncombe is at the tiller; and the country around us is absolutely silent, save for the singing of the birds.

"Do you really think there is anything in him?" she asks.

"Why, his brain is as full of projects as a hive is full of bees."

"But do you think he will succeed?"

"He ought to hit on a good thing sooner or later. He is industrious enough."

"And a successful play pays very well, does it not? It is worth trying for."

"That is hardly what he is aiming at. His family have plenty of money; and he is the eldest son. It's honour and glory that he is after—fame as an author—bowing his thanks to a crowded audience on a first night—and having young women write to him for his autograph."

"I'm sure I hope he will succeed," she remarks—and she seems to take a very sincere and good-natured interest in the young man's welfare. "But isn't it a very precarious profession? Don't you think he would have a much safer, a more settled, occupation if he kept to the law?"

"*A more* settled occupation, certainly; he could sit in his

rooms in the Temple, and read novels. There would be no anxiety about the dramatic critics then."

"But surely you will remonstrate with him about that," she says, with apparently honest concern. "Why, it is such a pity for a young man to make enemies, and at the very beginning of his career."

"He does not mean half what he says. He talks for the sake of talking—especially if there is a young lady listening. By-the-way, what has become of the aphorisms? We've had none of late."

"He says they did not meet with a flattering reception," answers Miss Peggy, who appears to have received a good many of Mr. Duncombe's confidences during the morning. "But I can tell you that he is still storing them up, and all kinds of suggestions, too, for plays and novels and sketches. He showed me his book. Oh, I thought it was very interesting to hear him talk about all the various things he meant to do; and some of them were very clever, and some very amusing. It was like being in a workshop, and looking at the materials; you couldn't help being interested. There was one suggestion for a short story or a sketch that seemed to me very funny: would it be breaking confidence if I told it to you?"

"You may depend on it I shall not rob the boy of his ideas."

"Well, it is the sub-editor of a provincial paper, and his room is on the ground-floor. It is a hot day, and the door is open. He has been writing an essay on presence of mind; but he has left that on his desk, and gone to a little table by the window, where lunch has been brought in for him. Well, he is at his lunch, when he hears a murmuring noise outside, and then one or two startled cries of warning nearer at hand; and he gets up to look over the under-sash into the street. At the same moment a leopard comes slouching in by the open door, and, without seeing him, sneaks away into the opposite corner of the room. Then he understands what the murmur of the crowd outside means; he remembers that a menagerie was to arrive in the town that day, and this leopard has escaped.

Then begins a description of his feelings. He daren't stir, for the slightest movement would attract the attention of the beast. And perhaps it will smell the chop on the table, and come round that way to him. The question is whether he should make one spring for the door, or wait for the menagerie people to come to his help. But he can't think—he can't decide anything—because he is in such a horrible fright: and his essay on presence of mind has gone entirely out of his head. Don't you see?"

"Yes; but what happens?"

"Oh, that's all."

"Oh, that's all. But what did the man do?"

"I don't know."

"Ah, now I see. The interest is psychological. Given the environment—that is to say, the four walls of a sub-editor's room, including a leopard, a man, and a fragrant chop: to find out what the man—his temperament subject to the laws and conditions of heredity—will probably be thinking about. That's it, is it? Well, it might be interesting; but, if Mr. Duncombe speaks to you of his projected story again, you may hint to him that the public, being gross and carnal-minded, would very likely want to know what the man did, and what the leopard did, too."

"I will," she says; and then she raises her eyes a little. "Are you aware that those two down there are talking; and I can see that they are talking about us; and I know that they are saying we are engaged in the study of English history. Now, are we?"

"Certainly not; we don't do such things."

"Well, I'm off. I don't like being subjected to suspicion. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

So Miss Peggy descends into the saloon; but she considerately leaves the window open behind her; and presently one hears a strumming on the banjo, and discovers that she is briskly busy with "Oh, dem golden slippers," "In the morning," and other alien airs.

When at length we reached Henley we stopped to bait the horse there, and we all went ashore; and, of course, for the sake of old associations, made our way to the Red Lion, the front of which was one magnificent mass of wistaria in full blossom, a sight worth coming all the way to see. It was while we were having tea in the well-known parlour overlooking the river that Jack Duncombe made these observations:

"We shall get to Sonning to-night; and I have been thinking that if Miss Rosslyn would like to see a capital specimen of an old-fashioned country inn, we might dine at the Bull there. Not the White Hart down by the river-side, that is beloved of cockneys; but the Bull that the artists who know the Thames swear by. It won't be exactly like dining at the Bristol; but it will be a good deal more picturesque. What do you say, Miss Rosslyn?"

Miss Rosslyn, who had taken off her sailor hat (thereby graciously revealing to us all the beautiful masses of her golden-brown hair) and was twirling the same on her fore-finger, made answer very prettily—"I am sure whatever you all think best will be best. Everything has been delightfully arranged so far—it is like a fairy dream to me. So don't ask me to give any opinion, please; it will be much better to leave it in your hands."

"We'll say the Bull, then," said he, just as if he were manager of the whole caravan.

And perhaps it was because of his familiarity with these parts that when we went out for a stroll through the pretty, clean-looking, red-and-white town, the young man naturally constituted himself Miss Rosslyn's companion and guide to all there was to be seen. And perhaps it was gratitude on her part that led her, when we returned to the boat, to take up her position in the stern-sheets, along with the other two, leaving the solitary watchman at the bow to his own meditations. But revenge was nigh. As we were passing Wargrave Marsh, one could hear a lot of chattering astern.

"If they're not snowdrops, what are they?"

"They *can't be* snowdrops, at this time of the year."

"They're too big for snowdrops."

"Mightn't snowdrops grow large in that swampy place?"

"Let's stop and see, anyway. Old Pal could get hold of some and throw them on board."

Then these innocents must needs stop the boat, and get the astonished driver to adventure his life through that dismal swamp, to reach certain white flowers growing among the rank vegetation near the water's edge. But even when these were got on board, and our progress resumed, the amateur botanists did not seem any the happier. The babblement continued. Then, after a pause—

"Peggy, you go and ask him".

Some one comes along, and through the saloon, and appears at the open window.

"They want you to tell them what kind of a snowdrop this is."

"Go away and don't talk to me. I don't know you."

"Please!"

"Well, you are a lot of pretty dears! That is your notion of a snowdrop is it? I suppose none of you are aware that the *Leucojum æstivum* is one of the chief botanical glories and treasures of the Thames?"

"But I can't remember that dreadful name," says Miss Peggy, with the blue eyes grown piteous. "Please, what else do they call it?"

"The snowflake."

"It isn't in Shakespeare?"

"No, it doesn't grow in Warwickshire."

"The snowflake," she says, taking the flowers into her hand again. "When I have told them what it is, I am coming back, if I may. May I?"

"You may."

As we follow the meanderings of the river between Shiplake Lock and Sonning, a grey mist begins to steal over the woods and wide meadows, and seems to presage the long-prayed-for rain. When we arrive at our destination, and walk up through the little village to the Bull Inn, there is just enough light to give our young American friend some vague idea of what the *place is like*—the quaint old-fashioned building of brick and

timber, with its red-tiled roof, its peaked windows and small-paned casements, the creepers trained up the wall, the large orchard on one side of the house, the row of tall limes in front. Inside, there is another tale to tell; for when we have made our way along the uneven flooring of the corridors, and stumbled headlong into the apartment where we are to dine, we find that lit up by a cheerful blaze of lamps, and everything looking very snug and comfortable indeed. It appears that it is Jack Duncombe who is running this circus, if the phrase may be allowed. We are his guests, he gives us to understand. And, of course, in his character of host he is bound to consult the wishes of the party—of the two women, that is to say; and very indefatigable and considerate he is about it. They even remonstrate. One of them is accustomed to yachting fare; the other has had experiences of camp-out. They beg of him not to be so exacting.

"But I want to show Miss Rosslyn what an English inn is like," he says; and that is supposed to settle the question: to please Miss Rosslyn everything must yield.

It is gratifying to be able to state that during the whole of this evening the conduct of Miss Rosslyn was quite beyond reproach. Young Duncombe was in rather an eager and talkative mood—perhaps from the consciousness that he was entertaining those people; and she paid him the most scrupulous and courteous attention. Whether he was in jest or in earnest, she listened; and he had adopted a kind of don't-you-think-so attitude towards her; and often her eyes smiled assent and approval even when she did not speak. One could see that Queen Tita occasionally threw a glance towards the girl that seemed to savour of sarcasm; but women are like that, and are not to be heeded. Miss Peggy was urbanity itself; and no doubt the young man was pleased to have secured so respectful a listener. Not only that, but she managed to pay him a little compliment in so dexterous a manner that the trivial incident is worth recording. He was putting forth the proposition, more or less seriously, that as we raise statues to those of our fellow-creatures who command our admiration and gratitude, so we ought *to have a* perpetual pillory for those who deserve the

universal execration of mankind. His first notion was to have a Chamber of Horrors in Westminster Abbey; but he concluded that something more cosmopolitan was wanted. And then, when we all began to back our candidates for admission to this Universal Pillory—Bloody Mary—Judge Jeffreys—Torquemada—Alva—Butcher Cumberland—and so on, it came to Miss Peggy's turn to make a suggestion.

"The critic who reviewed Keats's poems in the *Quarterly*," she said.

The allusion was so unmistakable to the complaint he had made that morning that he could hardly help being grateful to her for her proffered sympathy and alliance, even if he refused to regard himself as a distinguished poet, or to rank his ill-starred comedy with "Endymion". It was cleverly done on the part of Miss Peggy. It showed good-will. Indeed, her eyes showed that too, as she listened to the young man's discourse.

Now, when we left this snug hostelry to return to our Nameless Barge the two women led the way; and they had their arms interlinked; and were engaged in conversation. What that conversation was we were not permitted to hear; but on reaching the boat—which was all lit up, by-the-way, and in the darkness looked something like one of those illumined toy-churches, with coloured windows, that Italians used to sell in the streets—it was found that Miss Peggy was pretending to be very much annoyed with her friend. She wore an injured air. She would not speak. When Murdoch had got out the gang-board, and we were all in the saloon again, Mrs. Threepenny-bit went and took down the banjo.

"Come, now, Peggy, don't be vexed—or rather, don't pretend to be vexed. When I talk to you, it's for your good, and I tell you the truth. I'm not like those other people. Come along, now, and we'll have 'Carry me back to Tennessee,' as a kind of general good-night."

Miss Peggy glances at Jack Duncombe, and gently declines. The fact is this: at certain high jinks which the young lady has honoured with her presence, this song, as played by her on *the banjo, has been* in great request; partly because, no one

knowing the words, it could be prolonged indefinitely by singing to it verses of other songs, or even a leading article cut up into the requisite quantities, but mainly because it has an excellent chorus in which everybody can easily join. These festivities, however, were of a strictly esoteric character. The presence of a single stranger invariably put a check on certain of Miss Peggy's banjo performances; and especially upon "Carry me back to Tennessee". And now the fact that Mr. Duncombe had never been within the charmed circle is enough. It is in vain that cigars are lit, and soda-water (and other things) produced, so that we may have a final and friendly half-hour together: Miss Peggy remains obdurate.

"Oh, no," she says, "I'm afraid Mr. Duncombe would think it stupid—for no one knows the words."

"Why, that's all the fun of it! We'll take Dr. Watts's hymns this time. The words are nothing; the chorus is the objective point."

Miss Peggy reaches over and takes the instrument that is handed to her.

"No," she says, "but I'll try an English ballad I heard a little while ago—I don't know whether I can manage it with this thing."

She struck the strings, and almost directly we recognised the prelude of one of the quaintest and prettiest of the old ballad airs. And then Miss Peggy sang—

> Early one morning, just as the sun was rising,
> I heard a maid sing in the valley below;
> 'Oh, don't deceive me! Oh, never leave me!
> How could you use a poor maiden so?'"

And therewithal she looked across the table to Queen Tita—with eyes that spoke of injury and reproach, as clearly as the mischief in them would allow.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ah I remember well—and how can I
But evermore remember well—when first
Our flame began, when scarce we knew what was
The flame we felt; when as we sat and sighed,
And looked upon each other, and conceived
Not what we ailed, yet something we did ail,
And yet were well, and yet we were not well,
And what was our disease we could not tell.
Then would we kiss, then sigh, then look: and thus
In that first garden of our simpleness
We spent our childhood. But when years began
To reap the fruit of knowledge, ah, how then
Would she with sterner looks, with graver brow,
Check my presumption and my forwardness!
Yet still would give me flowers, still would show
What she would have me, yet not have me, know."

ALL this world of young summer foliage was thirsting for rain; you could have imagined that the pendulous leaves of the lime-trees, hardly moving in the light airs of the morning, were whispering among themselves, and listening for the first soft patterings of the longed-for shower. They were likely to get it, too. The swifts and swallows were flying low over the river, the sky was a uniform pale white, without any definite trace of cloud; there was a feeling of moisture in the faint-stirring wind. It was when we were passing Holme Park that it began—a few touches on hand or cheek, almost imperceptible, then heavier drops striking on the glassy surface of the stream, each with its little bell of air, and widening circle around it. There was an immediate call for waterproofs. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, when she was encased in hers, with the big hood over her head, looked amazingly like one of the mountain dwarfs in "Rip van Winkle"; Miss Peggy, on the other hand, wore a grey driving-coat that suited very well her tall and elegant figure, and also she had a grey Tam o' Shanter, which she declared was *impervious to the* wet. The four of us were now together in the

stern—Murdoch being engaged in the pantry; and it has before been observed by certain people who have large experience of weather that rain is a great promoter of good comradeship, fellow-sufferers appearing to combine for the very purpose of defying the elements, and cheating themselves into the belief that they are enjoying themselves very much indeed. The illusion is more likely to be maintained when the waterproofs are sound.

On this occasion Jack Duncombe was entertaining us with a lively account of certain gaieties and festivities that had taken place just before he left town, and also with notes and anticipations of the season then entering on its full swing. All this talk —into which well-known names were freely introduced—was naturally very interesting to our young American visitor; and she listened with a perfect attention. Of course he was far better qualified than simple country folk like ourselves to inform her ingenuous mind upon such matters; and she paid him every heed, and seemed to regard him with favour. Perhaps, to one or other of us, this echo of the great roar of the London season may have sounded strangely in these still solitudes, with nothing around us but whispering rain and shimmering water and the constantly moving landscape; but Miss Peggy was a young woman with a healthy and natural interest in every kind of social affair; and she was pleased to hear all this about balls, and drawing-rooms, and pastoral plays, and private views, and famous beauties and their costumes. He had his reward, too. Addressing her almost exclusively, he was privileged to look at her as much as he chose; and it has been remarked before in these pages, once or twice, that Miss Peggy's eyes were distinctly good-natured. Moreover, he talked more freely to her now; and was gradually resuming—of course, within respectful limits—his usual audacity of manner.

Incidentally, he mentioned the banjo craze, and made merry over the number of people, among his own acquaintance, who, with a light heart, had set about learning to play, and who had suddenly been brought up short, through want of ear or some *other cause.*

"I had a try myself," he said, modestly; "but I soon got to the end of my tether."

"But you play a little?" she said.

"Oh! yes; a little—in a mechanical sort of way. It isn't everybody has the extraordinary lightness of touch that you have."

"I am not a player at all," she said, "I am only a strummer. Anyhow, my banjo wants a thorough tuning some time or other, and I should be so much obliged to you if you would help me—if you would screw up the pegs while I tune the strings; it is much easier so."

"I think my knowledge of the instrument will go as far as that," said he, gravely.

"You know I meant no such thing," she said, laughing; and then she continued, with a fine air of carelessness: "What do you say to having it done now? If you will bring the banjo ——"

"Not into the rain," he protested; for a much less ready-witted young man than he could not have failed to perceive the chance before him. "No; we will go into the saloon, and have a thorough overhauling of the strings. It will be a capital way of passing the time, for I don't see much prospect of the weather clearing at present."

She was quite obedient. She rose, and shook the rain-drops from her sleeves and skirts, and passed through the door that he had courteously opened for her, he immediately following. When they had thus disappeared, Queen Tita was left alone with the steersman.

"That young man would better take care," she remarked, significantly.

"Why, what have you to say against her now? Did you ever see anyone behave more admirably—more simply and frankly and straightforwardly?"

"If you only knew, it is when Peggy is best behaved that she is most dangerous," was the dark answer. "She doesn't take all that trouble for nothing, you may be sure. Well behaved? *Oh! yes;* she is well behaved—she is a great deal too

well behaved. The guileless eyes, and her courtesy, and her charming manner. Why, last night she listened to him with as much reverence as if he were Mr. Spencer!"

"I suppose that was what you and she were quarrelling about, then?"

"We weren't quarrelling; but I asked her not to pretend to be too much of a simple innocent. I knew what she was after. Tennessee?—oh, dear no! No Tennessee before Mr. Duncombe. Properly-conducted young ladies don't sing Dr Watts's hymns with a chorus of 'Carry me back to Tennessee'."

"And that is the way a woman talks about her friend!"

"It isn't altogether her fault either. What I complain of is this—when you had all kinds of objections to Peggy's coming with us, I said that I was willing to take her as my own particular companion. If you were dissatisfied with her, I said she was good enough for me; and that was the arrangement. But what is the state of affairs now? Why, you two men monopolise her the whole day long. If it isn't the one of you, it's the other; and, of course, it doesn't matter to Peggy which of you it is, or whether it is either of you, so long as it is somebody she can carry on with. When there are no men about she is nice as nice can be."

"The fact is simply that you want her all to yourself, and are outrageously jealous of the smallest bit of attention she pays to anyone else; and you accuse her of 'carrying on' when she is merely decently civil to anyone who is talking to her."

"Decently civil! Too civil by half!"

"And you think she doesn't see through you, and know how to humour you? Why, it's a high comedy to watch her taking you in hand, whenever she thinks it necessary, and stroking and petting you into a good temper, just as if you were a baby; only you are a good deal more amenable than a baby when it is Peggy that pets you."

"I repeat, that when there are no men about she is just as nice as nice can be. She is an honest, frank, good girl, and very kind and affectionate; but directly men come along she gets *mischief into her* head, for it amuses her to see them make

fools of themselves. And if they could only look at themselves in a mirror."

"I thought that was the occupation of a woman. Who was it who said that the only furniture a woman wanted in a room was ten mirrors and a powder-puff?"

"Nobody ever said anything so ridiculous. You are always inventing spiteful things about women, and putting them down to some imaginary French philosopher. You think I don't know better!"

"You know everything; and so, perhaps, you can tell me how long it takes to tune up a banjo?"

They certainly were an unconscionable time about it. The rain had almost ceased now; different lights were appearing in the sky—warm greys that had a cheerful look about them; and the birds had resumed their singing, filling all the air with a harmonious music. We crossed the mouth of the river Kennet, thus beginning the long loop which we hoped to complete by means of the Thames, Severn, Avon, and Kennet, with the intermediate canals, until we should return to this very spot. As we went by Reading, however, our hopes for fine weather were for the moment dashed; a "smurr" came over, and the thin veil of the shower toned down the colours of the red houses, the meadows golden with buttercups, the bronze foliage of the poplars, the various greens of willow and elm and chestnut, and the shadowy blue of the distant and low-lying hills. Perhaps it ought to be explained that, standing on the gunwale of a house-boat enables one to see an immeasurably wider stretch of landscape than when one is rowing; and the board that we had placed across for the convenience of the steersman could always accommodate two or three people standing side by side. And so (while that banjo seemed to take a lot of tuning) we went on through the phantasmal atmosphere, watching the few signs of life that were visible in the still world around us. A large heron rose suddenly, his long legs dangling beneath him; but soon he had these securely tucked up, and was sailing away on his heavy-flapping wings. A peewit, with startled cry and erratic flight, jerked himself into

the higher air. A moor-hen, disturbed by the tow-rope, went whirring across the river; and we could see in the rushes the nest she had left, with her brood of young ones in it. As for excitement and occupation on this rather idle day, these were always afforded us by the considerate carelessness of the Thames Conservators, for the towing-line was continually catching up on some broken stump or unyielding willow, and only a wild yell to Palinurus saved us, on these occasions, from being dragged bodily on to the bank.

Nearing Purley, the tow-path twice crosses the river; and now Jack Duncombe appears at the bow, and gets hold of the long pole, while Miss Rosslyn comes along and joins her friends aft.

"I had no idea it had left off raining," she observes, innocently.

"I hope you got the banjo properly tuned," one of us says to her.

"Oh, yes; it is much better now," she answers, pleasantly, and with an artless air. "But Mr. Duncombe was too modest. He can play very fairly indeed. He played two or three things just to try the banjo, and I was quite surprised."

"Oh, you can give him some lessons, Peggy," her friend says; but the young lady won't look her way; and the sarcasm —if any was intended—is lost.

Now, it was at our second crossing—to the Berkshire side —that a small incident occurred of which we did not get the explanation till nightfall. Having to wait a little while for the horse coming over on the ferry-boat, we landed and loitered about under some magnificently tall black poplars near to the river's side. Miss Peggy was talking, in the most casual way, about nothing in particular, to the veracious chronicler of these events, when something happened, or was perceived, that seemed to afford Queen Tita much covert amusement. The twopenny-halfpenny secret, whatever it was, was imparted to Jack Duncombe, as we could see.

"What is she laughing at?" says Miss Peggy.

"*Goodness only* knows. The diversions of Purley, perhaps

I don't see much reason for gaiety about the place, or about the weather either."

"If you want to find out, do you know how?" says Miss Peggy, with an engaging smile. "All you have to do is to refrain from asking. If you ask them, they will make a mystery of it. If you don't ask, you may be certain they will speak about it—they couldn't keep their enjoyment to themselves."

There seemed to be a modicum of wisdom in these observations of this innocent-eyed young thing; and so not a word was said as we got on board and resumed our peaceful progress through this still and silvery-grey day. The rain had stopped; the birds had begun again; and steadily the prow of the Nameless Barge kept cutting in twain the lakelike reflections on the smooth surface of the river.

We stopped for luncheon a little above Whitchurch Lock, and moored so close in among the willows that one or two branches appeared at the open window of the saloon, making rather a pretty decoration there. Then we went on and past the beechwoods of Basildon. Everywhere there was a grey mist after the rain; but all the same there was a faint light on the tops of the trees that seemed to suggest the possibility of the sun breaking through those pallid skies.

It was here that Mrs. Threepenny-bit's jealousy declared itself. She seemed to think (and perhaps not unnaturally) that these two young people had had quite enough of each other's society; and may have thought it was hardly fair she should be so entirely deprived of her own chosen companion. So she comes along to the stern-sheets, where Miss Peggy and Jack Duncombe are talking together, overlooked but unheeded by the steersman, who, indeed, has enough to do with the recurrent obstructions on the bank.

"Peggy," she says, "would you like to do a human being a great kindness?"

"Why, yes," the young lady answers instantly. "What is it? Who is it?"

"It's Murdoch, poor fellow. He wouldn't utter a word of *complaint or disappointment*, you know—not for worlds; but I

do believe he would rather be a deck hand on board the *Dunara Castle* than get double wages on board a thing like this. Now, come along, Peggy, and we'll cheer him up a bit. We'll pretend to be on board a yacht."

Miss Peggy jumps to her feet with alacrity; she may have many evil qualities, but a want of good-nature is not amongst them.

"But how?" she says, putting her hand on her friend's shoulder.

"I'll show you," is the answer; and the women disappear ogether.

"Now," says the steersman of this unjustly-despised vessel to his sole remaining companion, "do you want a word of friendly advice?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Listen and take heed. This night at dinner, whenever you see anything that looks particularly deadly—magenta-coloured jellies, dark devices in the way of lobster, mushroom patties, olives stuffed with bacon—I say, whenever you see anything that looks absolutely fatal, you must seize on it and eat it boldly—never mind the consequences—and as boldly must you praise it. Now remember. You have been warned. Never mind what happens to you. You've got to do it."

"Well," says he, looking rather bewildered, "I suppose a man can't die better than by facing fearful odds—though doing that in a game of billiards is more in my line. But really, if I am to rush upon death in this way, I should like to know what for?"

"What for? Haven't you got eyes and ears? Didn't you see these two women go away? Didn't you hear them say they were going to pretend to be on board a yacht? And don't you know what is happening at this moment? They have got the table in the saloon covered over with cloths; and Murdoch is taking them flour, and butter and jam, and lobster, and grated cheese, and nutmeg, and caviare, and olives, and I don't know what; and soon they'll be engaged in turning out kromeskis, and rissoles, and croquettes, and every kind of poisonous invention of the devil. What's more, now they've begun, they'll go on. How long do you expect to survive?"

"I don't know," said he. "I can stand a good deal. Some constitutions are pretty wiry. They say there was a Sepoy at the end of the Indian Mutiny who was to be blown from a gun; and he was so tough that, when the cannon was fired, his body merely stretched out and let the ball go by, and when they came to untie him, he collapsed again, and was quite well; and they were so disgusted they could do nothing but give him a kick and send him off."

"The story is a little improbable, but, no doubt, true. However, that Sepoy had never sailed in a boat with two amateur cooks on board."

"I think I can score here," the young man said, thoughtfully; but he would not explain further; and one could only guess that he was contemplating a mean and cowardly breach of confidence.

Indeed we were well rid of those women; for we found the towing-path at this part of the river—especially after we crossed at Moulsford Ferry—to be in a most disgraceful state of neglect, and we were continually getting into trouble with broken fences, posts, and willow stumps. It must be admitted, however, that we were ourselves partly responsible for these calamities. For one thing, our towing-line should have been attached to the top of the "house," instead of to the bow of the boat (most of the canal barges have a mast or pole for the purpose), and the increased height thus gained would have enabled us to clear at least some of the obstructions. For another, Palinurus had a habit of keeping his gaze fixed on the far future; he seemed to consider that, so long as he could urge Coriolanus onward, he had no concern with anything that was happening behind. The worst of it was that a single hitch generally begat several hitches; for when once one of the broken posts or impenitent bushes had caused the Nameless Barge to "run her nozzle agin the bank," there was a difficulty in getting proper steering-way on her, and a consequent risk of further entanglements. However, we encountered these delays with patience, and crept on by Little Stoke, and Cholsey, and towards Winterbrook; *while the tinkling* notes of "I'll meet her when the sun goes

down" told us one of two things—either that the labours of the amateur cooks were ended, or that those two people had stolen away on false pretences, to have a confabulation together.

"Do you know, that is a very interesting girl," says Jack Duncombe, reflectively, as he listens to the banjo.

"Indeed?"

"Oh, very," he repeats with decision.

"I don't know much about her myself. I have been told by a friend of hers that she is as characterless as a woman in a fashion plate."

"Well, you see," observes this profound student of mankind, "all Americans are interesting in a way. You never know what strain of blood may reveal itself; and probably the American himself couldn't tell you; so there is always a possibility of surprise. He may be descended from one of Captain John Smith's 'broken men'—the adventurers and desperadoes who went to the South; or he may have the sour Puritanical leaven in him, and, in spite of his nineteenth-century manner and clothes, be at heart an intolerant bigot and persecutor, if he had the chance. Or he may have French blood in his veins, or Spanish, or even a drop of Red Indian. You never know how it may develop itself."

"Your interest in Miss Peggy, then, is purely ethnological?" one asks of him, merely for the sake of information.

"Oh, well," he says, after a quick glance of suspicion, "she is a very nice girl besides that. I was talking of Americans in general."

"And from what kind of stock do you suppose Miss Peggy is descended?"

"Of course I can't tell; but I know she was very much pleased when I told her that the Rosslyn family here spell their name just as her family do. She only knew it in connection with Roslin Abbey; and thought it had got corrupted in America. She says she doesn't know where her people originally came from."

"From the garden of Eden, I presume."

"I can *imagine* her delight if you could show her that her

family were settled in some part of this country even three hundred years ago. And as for the Conquest ——"

"But the name is a little older than that, my young friend. *Ross* and *lyn* are two British words—the meadow of the pool or waterfall they mean, if that is any news to you."

"It is extraordinary the interest she takes in anything that's old," continues this young man, who seems to have been using his opportunities of studying Miss Peggy's character, or no-character, with some diligence. "Old furniture, old jewellery, old buildings, anything that has been handed down from former times. And she is so anxious to know how people lived then; and whether their present descendants are like them in any way; and whether the representatives of the great families of England are different from the ordinary people one meets. You should hear her talk about the Tower and Westminster Abbey. I think it was the historical characters in Shakespeare that captivated her imagination, to begin with. I fancy that has had a good deal to do with it."

"So you have been engaged in teaching her English history?"

"No," says this impertinent boy; "I leave that to my elders and betters." And there is a flash of delight in his grey eyes at getting this easy chance. Of course there is no reply. Babies in sarcasm should be encouraged rather than crushed.

We moored at Wallingford that night; and by the time that dinner was ready it was dark enough to have the lamps and candles lit. And perhaps, as we sat in this little room—and observed our young Dramatist's feeble efforts to guess at what dishes were the handiwork of the amateur cooks—the place looked all the more snug that the pattering of the rain on the roof was continuously audible. It seemed a familiar sound, somehow. We had heard it, in similar circumstances, in very far out-of-the-way places indeed. How could we tell—seated in this little cabin—with the blinds drawn and the doors shut—but that outside were the mist-hung cliffs of Bourg, and the dark solitudes of Loch-na-Keal? Perhaps, if one were to step forth into that dismal world of rain one might peer through it *for the red ray of* Rona lighthouse? Or, perhaps, there might

be heard the muffled thunder of the western seas surging into the caves of Staffa, or the distant murmur of the tides where Corvrechtan seethes and whirls along the Scarba rocks? We knew nothing of Wallingford; Wallingford was but a name to us. Here was a cabin, comfortably lit and snug, and here was a small group of friends sufficiently well interested in each other; and these immediate surroundings were independent of such external things as we could not see. But if Queen Tita had imagined that at that moment she could have caught a glimpse of the piercing white light of Lismore, be sure she would not have been sitting there. In one swift second she would have been out and on deck, despite the heaviest rain that ever poured.

"Sufficiently well interested in each other"—the phrase seems inadequate to the occasion. For had we not with us a person whose ethnological antecedents might spring a surprise on us at any moment? One began to wonder how the strain of blood would manifest itself. Would she unexpectedly leap upon us and endeavour to scalp one or other of us with a fruit-knife? Would she incoherently clamour for another Bartholomew Massacre? Or begin to sing psalms through her nose? These and other possibilities—young Shakespeare had said they were possibilities—were somewhat bewildering; but as a matter of fact, at this instant, the Ethnological Curiosity was calmly carving a slice of pine-apple; and her eyes were cast down; and she was listening to Jack Duncombe; and the smile that hung about her rosebud mouth seemed to say that she was being amiably entertained by her companion. For the rest, she wore on this evening certain swathes of pale pink and pale yellow muslin that came round her neck, and were fastened at her waist; and anything more cool and summer-like could not well be imagined.

Dinner over, the two women-folk retired to the upper end of the saloon, next to the big window; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit took down the banjo, and, without a word, handed it to Miss Peggy.

"Ah, I know what will fetch you," the girl said, with a not unkindly smile,

She struck a few low notes of introduction, and then began —"Once in the dear dead days beyond recal". It was an air that suited her contralto voice admirably; and when she came to the refrain—"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low," —she sang that with a very pretty pathos indeed; insomuch that, when she had ended, Queen Tita did not thank her with any speech, but she put her hand within the girl's arm instead, and let it remain there. With her disengaged arm Miss Peggy held out the banjo.

"You now," she said to Mr. Duncombe, in her frank way.

He took the banjo from her, of course.

"Oh, I can't sing," he said; "but I'll try to give you some idea of a rather quaint little ballad that most people know of; though very few have heard the whole of it, I imagine. Of course you have seen the play of 'The Green Bushes'?"

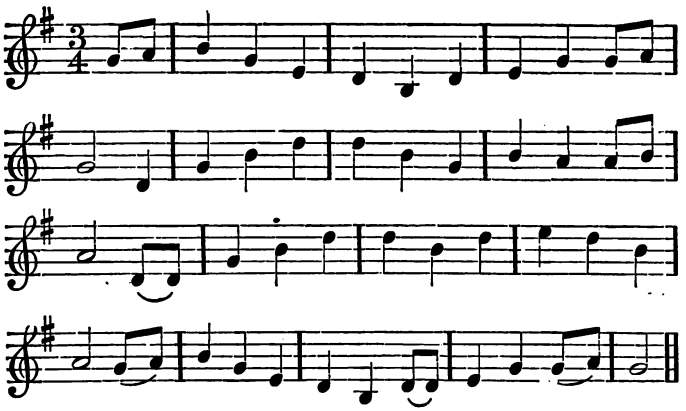
Miss Peggy had not.

"Oh, well, it is an old-fashioned melodrama that used to be very popular—perhaps it is now, when it is revived. I won't describe it to you; but there is one part of it in which a young girl goes away in search of her foster-sister, whom she has lost; and she wanders through all the towns and villages in Ireland singing a song that both of them knew, until the foster-sister hears her, and rushes to the window. I think it is a very affecting bit, myself. I'm not ashamed to say that it has made me cry like a baby, though Miami, the real heroine of the piece, dosen't seem to impress me much. Well, now, this is the song the girl sings. The fact is, I ——"

He hesitated for a second.

"—I once knew a young actress who used to play the part, and I asked her to give me the words; and she wrote them down for me as far as she knew them."

Possibly one or other of us may have been guessing that perhaps there existed another reason for his interest in things theatrical besides his thirst for fame; but he had already begun to strum out, in a more or less effective fashion, some such *air as this:*



And then he sang, with good expression, if with no great voice:

It's I was a-walking one morning in May
To hear the birds singing and see lambkins play,
I espied a young damsel, so sweetly sang she,
Down by the Green Bushes where she chanced to meet me.

"Remember," said he, "the words were written down from memory, and I may have got them all wrong."

Then he went on:

"Oh, why are you loitering here, pretty maid?"
"I'm waiting for my true love," softly she said;
"Shall I be your true love, and will you agree
To leave the Green Bushes and follow with me?

"I'll buy you fine beavers and fine silken gowns,
I'll give you smart petticoats flounced to the ground,
I'll buy you fine jewels, and live but for thee,
If you'll leave your own true love and follow with me."

"The flounced petticoats make me think the ballad must be old," said the troubadour; and he continued

"Oh, I want not your beavers, nor your silks, nor your hose,
For I'm not so poor as to marry for clothes;
But if you'll prove constant and true unto me,
Why, *I'll leave the* Green Bushes and follow with thee.

"Come, let us be going, kind sir, if you please,
Oh, let us be going from under these trees,
For yonder is coming my true love I see,
Down by the Green Bushes where he was to meet me."

And it's when he came there and found she was gone,
He was nigh heart-broken, and cried out forlorn:
"She has gone with another and forsaken me,
And left the Green Bushes where she used to meet me!"

"Well, now, I call that just delightful!" Miss Peggy exclaimed at once. "Why, I haven't heard anything so quaint and pretty for many a day! Just delightful, I call it. Mr. Duncombe, it is always a shame to steal people's songs, and especially this one, that is in a kind of way your own property; but really I should like to take it back home with me. Would you mind singing it over to me some other time—I think I could remember it."

"But I will copy it out for you!" he said instantly.

"It would be too much trouble," she rather faint-heartedly suggested.

"It would give me a great deal of pleasure to copy it out for you," said he, quite earnestly, and then she thanked him, with her eyes cast down.

We had some further playing and singing (but no "Tennessee"; oh, no; she was too well behaved; the time was not yet), and by-and-by the hour arrived for our retiring to our several bunks. All this afternoon and evening Mrs. Threepenny-bit—our Mrs. Threepenny-bit she ought to be called, as she is a partner in the firm, and, indeed, gives herself as many airs as if she were the whole firm in her own proper person—had had no opportunity of revealing the cause of her sinister laughter at Purley; and indeed the person to whom Miss Peggy had confided her prediction had forgotten all about the matter. Just before our final separating for the night, however, that opportunity chanced to occur; and then Miss Peggy's prophecies came true.

"I suppose you didn't notice what happened at Purley?" she says.

"*I saw you grinning like a fiend, that was all.*"

"Of course, you weren't aware that when Peggy and you were standing under those big poplars, there was a bunch of mistletoe right over your heads."

"I was not aware of it; but if I had been, what difference would that have made?"

"Why, none, of course, as far as you are concerned. You wouldn't have dared. But we were thinking, supposing Peggy had discovered it, what a horrible fright she would have got."

"Indeed. And so you at once assume that mistletoe grows in America; and you are also quite sure that Miss Peggy knows what it means?"

"What?" she says, as she prepares to slip back again into the saloon. "Peggy not know? Peggy not know what a branch of mistletoe means? I wonder what there is in that direction that Peggy doesn't know!"

Well, well. Man's inhumanity to man has often been bewailed by the poets; but man's inhumanity to man is the veriest milk and honey compared to the inhumanity which a woman, without the least hesitation or scruple, will inflict on her so-called bosom-friend.

CHAPTER VII.

"My time, O ye Muses, was happily spent,
When Phœbe went with me wherever I went;
Ten thousand sweet pleasures I felt in my breast:
Sure never fond shepherd like Colin was blest!
But now she is gone, and has left me behind,
What a marvellous change on a sudden I find!
When things were as fine as could possibly be,
I thought 'twas the Spring; but alas! it was she."

THE ancient little town of Wallingford, as every schoolboy ought to know—but probably doesn't—has as much history crammed into its annals as would furnish subject-matter for twenty lectures. The destruction of its walls by the Parliamentary army was an affair of but the other day, so to speak—a quite recent occurrence, when you come to treat of the chronicles of Wallingford. Why, they had a Mint established here before the Norman Conquest! Can it be wondered at, then, that when we go on shore for a prowl through this venerable borough, Miss Peggy should naturally associate herself with the only member of the party capable of giving her a clear and comprehensive view of the transactions of the last dozen centuries? The frivolity of youth may be acceptable for the moment; the singing of "Green Bushes" and strumming on guitars, and such nonsense, may pass an idle evening; but when the ingenuous mind seeks for higher things—when it asks for instruction and lucid and ample and accurate information—it is to age, or at least to a respectable seniority, that it unhesitatingly turns. Mr. Jack Duncombe seemed surprised that his companion of the previous day should so wantonly forsake him, and march off without a word of apology. But what did *he* know about Saxons and Danes? He would have put Archbishop Laud and Sir William Blackstone into the same century; and, just as likely as not, he would have gloried in his ignorance.

And yet, as we perambulate the damp and almost deserted

streets of the little town, on this dull, blowy, uncertain, grey-skied morning, it is not of history, ancient or modern, that Miss Peggy is talking. A suggestion has been made to her that we should try to obtain, somewhere or other, a newspaper, to find out what has been occurring all this time throughout the inhabited globe. Miss Peggy distinctly objects.

"No, no," she says, "it is far more delightful to be cut off from everybody and everything. Never mind what has been happening. They are all minding their own affairs; and they have forgotten us; and we are much better to be entirely by ourselves."

"And empires may be going to smash, and you don't care!"

"I'll tell you what I should like to do now," she says. "I should like to be able to pop up to the sun, for just a single day, and go round with him, and see the whole thing—see how everything was going on all the way round, and what it all looked like—and then come back and alight at the same place at the end of the twenty-four hours."

"Your notions of science are primitive, Miss Peggy."

"Oh! I hate science," she says, pausing for a second at a milliner's shop-window, and then coming on again; "I just hate science. It never tells you anything that interests you. I don't care a cent whether there is or is not carbonate of soda in the moon. I like living things—human beings, mostly."

"But not too many of them at once?"

"Why, science can't tell you what the life of a butterfly is, let alone the life of a costermonger, or a priest, or an actress ——"

"Or a young lady whose pastime is the destruction of the peace of mind of young men?"

"Well, anything you like," she says, carelessly. "I don't want to know what chemicals I'm made up of. I want to know why the look of some women makes me distrust or dislike them; and why you take to other women, almost at first sight, and want to be friends with them; and why you detest some men, and why other men are—well, not so detestable: things of that kind are *really* interesting. I should like to know how

we came to be in the world at all—and every one of us different from the other, that's the odd thing; and where we are going when we leave it?"

"Wouldn't it be easier to decide where you think you deserve to go?"

"Ah," she says, and it is a bootmaker's window she is looking into now, for these things seem strangely civilised after our solitary intercourse with meadows and trees and water and clouds, "I have told you before: if only you were honest, you would admit that you never met anyone as good as I am; and you would say that I behave like a perfect angel."

"I am ready to swear to both. The fact is that your behaviour at present is not only very good, but so good as to be suspicious."

She forsakes the bootmaker's window.

"Let's see, what were we talking about?" she asks, though her eyes are covertly laughing.

"You were assuming that the sun went round the earth, for one thing."

"Oh, I hate astronomy," she says, perhaps glad enough to get away to this new subject. "There is no plan in astronomy, no regularity; everything is different from everything else; and that is what makes it difficult to understand. Now, for example, why shouldn't there be a crescent sun as well as a crescent moon?"

"There ought to be a crescent sun, certainly, if you think so. By the way, wasn't it at some parsonage near this same town of Wallingford that Soapy Sam of Winchester was visiting when the page-boy was sent to call him in the morning? Don't you remember the story?"

Her eyes are inscrutable.

"Don't you? Why, the page had been enjoined to address the Bishop as 'my lord'; but he got confused; and when he knocked at the door—don't you remember the story?"

A small twinkle comes into her eyes.

"What made you weep, grandmother dear, when the *chestnut-bell was* ringing?" remarks this impertinent American

minx; and then she adds, irrelevantly—"Say, it isn't really going to rain, is it?"

Now, this is a candid description of the kind of conversation that was going on; and everybody must see that if it wasn't very coherent, nor yet very profitable for instruction, at least it was harmless enough. Why, therefore, that young man should have kept worrying, and interfering, and bothering us with his townhalls and old churches and Roman remains simply passes one's comprehension. To humour him, we went away down a stable-yard—belonging to the George Inn, I think—in order to look at a door of carved wood which, he said, had originally belonged to Wallingford Castle. It was very old, he informed us. He added that it was of Spanish pine. And when we suggested that so valuable a relic (he said it was valuable) need not have been disfigured with a coat of hideous paint, he seemed hurt. And when Miss Peggy said she wanted to go and find a "store" where she could get some silk and wool for her crewel work, Mr. Duncombe was left to continue his exploration of the antiquities of Wallingford in the society of his hostess, who, as ever, was bland towards him and complaisant.

On our return to the boat, and while we were making the necessary preparations for resuming our voyage, the weather looked as if it might turn to anything. The wind had risen; there was a surcharged sky; there were shifting gleams of light here and there.

"Before long, you will find a good deal of Constable about," is the general warning.

"That means waterproofs," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, promptly. "I don't like good landscapy days. They always mean either waterproofs or sitting indoors."

Indeed, the words were hardly out of her mouth when the rain began—a few pattering drops, rapidly developing into a smart shower; in the midst of which both the women-folk summarily retreated into the saloon, leaving the navigators of this noble vessel to themselves.

"Well, we shall be in Oxford to-morrow," says the young man—*and he need not* look so exceedingly depressed simply

because Miss Peggy has not paid him as much attention this morning as usual—"and I shall be glad of it. The real business of your trip will begin then. All this Thames affair is just a little bit too familiar."

"To you, perhaps; but not to us. Besides, we are entertaining a young American stranger, who has never been up the Thames before, and who seems to like it well enough."

He declines to speak about Miss Rosslyn.

"The Thames has been done by everybody; I am looking forward to something more novel."

"And you are likely to get it, too, if all they say is true about those disused canals. But what have you to complain of now—except the rain, and that's going off? Why, we were told we should find the Thames overcrowded; and yet we have had it practically to ourselves. Do you want anything more solitary and remote?"

If he had had the honesty to confess it, it was his solitariness at this moment that was weighing on his spirits; for he was listening to the distant tinkling of a banjo. Any sane person would instantly have construed that into an invitation, and would have gone away forward to the saloon; but young people, when they have taken offence, are peculiar. Here he was quarrelling with the Thames, which a good many folk have declared to be a beautiful river. It was a pity he could not urge objections against the Nameless Barge, for that was chiefly of his own designing. He could not even find fault, decently, with the weather, for it was doing its very best to improve—already there was a pale, watery sunlight breaking through the clouds, and wandering over the misty green landscape. Why did not he forthwith summon the two women to come out again? Because Miss Peggy, who was a diligent young lady, had to go away and buy silk and wool and things of that kind when she should have been searching with him for the remains of Roman walls?

It was left for someone else to summon them. Murdoch, having finished with his duties of the morning, had smartened *himself up*, and now came forth from his quarters.

"Will I tek the tiller, Sir?"

"No, thank you."

Before going in again, in sailor-like fashion he gave a rapid glance to his surroundings. And very likely he may have been thinking that here was a capital sailing-day just being thrown away and wasted. The breeze that was blowing us onward was strong enough to raise the silvery surface of the river into hurrying waves; the willows were rustling and bending their foliage now grey, now green; the buttercups were nodding in the meadows, or lying prone before the blast. And in this brief look round, something caught his attention—certain lilac-grey and white birds circling round, or darting this way and that, against the leaden-hued and windy sky. Murdoch regarded them with astonishment.

"Bless me!" he said, apparently to himself. "They're no' sea-swallows!"

"But they are," one of us answers him; "and they mean remarkably bad weather when they make their appearance in these parts."

"Well, well—indeed, now!" said he, still eyeing them with an astonished curiosity. "And it iss a long weh from home that they hef come."

Clearly Murdoch imagines that the terns have come all the way from the Sound of Mull, or Loch Sunart, or some such distant place; but the next moment he disappears. We cannot hear him; but we know he is tapping at the door of the saloon. Presently two women appear at the bow, one of them holding on her sailor-hat, for the breeze is brisk.

"Do you see those terns?" the other one cries, in the teeth of the wind

"Yes of course," answers the man at the wheel

"What are they doing here?"

"Raising a storm. Don't you know that we are simply flying?—we shall be dragging Coriolanus along directly."

"What do terns mean by ——"

The sentence was never completed, for a startled yell from the steersman suddenly rent the air. The tow-line had caught

on a stump. Palinurus, with his gaze as usual fixed on the far horizon, was paying no heed; and by the time that the cry of alarm had recalled him to his senses, the Nameless Barge had quietly slewed round, and run its nose, gently but firmly, into a bank of mud, rushes, willow-shrubs, and miscellaneous water-weeds.

One of us, of course, has to go to the bow, as Palinurus sadly returns to unhitch the line; for in such an emergency what are women good for but sarcasm?

"You were boasting just a little too much of your speed!" says the elder fiend.

"It was those confounded birds—everybody was looking at them."

"Tern, Fortune, tern thy wheel, and lower the proud," says the younger one, in an undertone; but she need not have been afraid—in any case the wind would have prevented Jack Duncombe from overhearing her flippant impertinence.

That ignominious stoppage took place on the stretch of water between Benson Lock and Shillingford Bridge; but we were soon on our way again—the favouring wind making of the labour of Coriolanus a mere holiday task. In due course of time we had passed Shillingford and the mouth of the small river Thame; and had caught sight, across the fields, of Dorchester Abbey, and also of the sinuous lines of the fortifications of a Roman camp. We moored for luncheon by the side of a meadow just above Day's Lock. Here the bank is a few feet high; so that, sitting at table, we found that the buttercups and dandelions and daisies, all swaying and nodding in this brisk breeze, were just level with our windows and our view. The banquet was not attended with state. Our only companions were the swallows skimming along and across the stream. We had no brass band playing; but there was a lark singing high in the heavens, and somewhere, in the distance, the occasional carol of a thrush. The only other sound was the rippling of the wind-ruffled water along the sides of the boat. For stillness, and solitariness, and silence, we might have been in the depths of a Canadian forest.

Now, during all this time these two young people had not

approached each other; and of course it was not for Miss Peggy to make the first advances, even if she had been so inclined. And in any case he did not give her the opportunity; for he devoted himself entirely to Queen Tita; and as he was talking to her in a half-scornful, half-petulant fashion, we guessed that once more the critics were catching it. Some scraps of his conversation reached us.

"I wish the newspaper-offices could be flooded with carbolic acid," we overheard him say, rather angrily.

"Why?" asked Queen Tita, with much civility.

"Because the scientific fellows say that carbolic acid destroys low organisms."

"Yes?" she said again, not understanding.

"Well, the number of critics would be considerably reduced."

"If the dramatic critics," one interposed, to put this foolish boy straight, "are like the literary critics, you wouldn't find one of them in the newspaper-offices. You would be more likely to find them in South Kensington, living in palatial houses, each with his brougham, and their wives going to Drawing-Rooms and Foreign Office receptions. Do you still imagine there is such a place as Grub-street?"

And yet again we could hear Queen Tita telling him of some of her adventures in Italy, and magnifying the mercilessness of the mosquitoes in certain of the towns; and when she spoke of having been stung so badly, on one occasion, that her arm was swollen from the hand up to the elbow, he said:

"Of course the mosquito must have been feeding on some putrid object—a critic, most likely".

Whereupon Miss Peggy asked, in a low voice:

"Were they very severe about his comedy?"

That, however, is a question which one cannot answer her; because plays by novices are not very interesting to the ordinarily busy person in this country; while newspaper criticism of plays by novices fail still more to arouse the attention. Besides, at the time that Jack Duncombe's piece was produced, we knew hardly anything about him.

We had to wait a considerable time for the return of Old

Pal, for it appeared that, he having gone to fetch a bucket of water for Coriolanus, that gallant steed had wandered off into space, and had got near to Dorchester before he was found. But he in no wise refused to resume his appointed task; he took to it quite placidly; and once more we were peacefully gliding through the still landscape. The afternoon was clearing, though there was still an April look about the banked-up clouds, with their breadths of bronze or saffron-hued lights here and there. A touch of blue was visible in places; the various tints of the foliage had grown more vivid; at last there was a glimmer of pale sunlight on the rippling water. Indeed, there was more of Constable than of Corot, now, as the world seemed to emerge from the prevailing mist. And so we went on by Clifton Hampden, and by Appleford, and by Sutton Courtney (Miss Peggy was of opinion that these old English names were a good deal prettier than Clearanceville, Cuttingsville, and the like); the most exciting incident the while being the sudden scurrying across a field of a hare, that sits up on its haunches and regards us, looking singularly red among the green, or the whirring away of a brace of partridges, put up by Coriolanus, the birds eventually subsiding into a wide and golden sea of buttercups.

We had had some thoughts of pushing on to Oxford that evening; but as rain began to fall again, and as we wished Miss Peggy's first impressions of the famous University town to be favourable, we resolved upon passing the night at Abingdon. Indeed, we were all of us glad to get in out of the wet; and when waterproofs had been removed, and candles lit, the blinds drawn, and Murdoch's ministrations placed on the table, it did not much matter to us what part of England happened to be lying alongside our gunwale. Miss Peggy, it may be said, was quite preoccupied about this city of Oxford; a great part of the afternoon she had spent in reading up the history of the various colleges, in such guide-books as we had with us; and it was understood that, until the weather improved, we should go no further, but rather give up the time to showing *her over the* most interesting of these foundations.

"And you will find other objects of interest, Peggy," her hostess says to her. "You will see a great many very good looking lads, all with their college cap and gown on."

"You said they call themselves men as soon as they went to Oxford?" Miss Peggy observes—for she is always curious about English ways and customs.

"So they do, but they're mostly boys, all the same. And very pretty boys, too—of the unmistakable English type—light-haired, clear-complexioned, and clear-eyed; nearly all of them well-built, athletic-looking young fellows. Oh, yes, you will find some objects of interest in the Oxford streets! And, of course, you can't expect but that they may look at you a little—just the least possible thing, as you go by."

Miss Peggy shifts the subject, as one having no concern for her.

"Do you know an inn called the Mitre?" she asks, innocently.

"Of course we do."

"But they say it dates from the fourteenth century?" she says, glancing towards one of the guide-books as though the compiler of it had been trying to impose on her.

"Well?"

"The fourteenth century?" she continues. "Why, that was long and long before Shakespeare's time. And if the inn was there when he lived, I suppose he must have passed it every time he went to Stratford or came back to London. Oxford is on the high road to Stratford, isn't it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And do you mean that Shakespeare really passed this inn every time—or, perhaps, slept the night in it?"

"Well, tradition says there was another inn in Oxford—the Crown—that was his favourite haunt. But certainly he must have passed the Mitre—though it was probably not in all its parts precisely the same building that you'll find there to-day."

"But, really—he used to ride along the same street that we shall be in to-morrow?" she says, in a half-bewildered way. "Well, you can't understand how strange that is to me. These things and places seem to us at home to be so very far away

when we read about them—it is all like a kind of fairy-land. You don't expect ever to see the actual street."

"Come, now, Miss Peggy," one of us says to her, "how will this do? We shall probably have to remain in Oxford for two or three days. There are some arrangements to be made; we have to find out somebody who is familiar with the canals; and we have to get a horse for him as well; and a lot of things of that kind. Then you want to see the colleges, and one or two of the libraries and museums. Besides that, we have several friends in the place, who will expect us to call on them, and they will be only too anxious to entertain a simple-minded young American stranger, so long as she behaves herself. And then, again, we don't want you to see our English scenery through a deluge of rain; we must wait for better weather. Now, Folly Bridge, where we shall moor this stately vessel, is a good bit away from the centre of the town, and it might be a nuisance to be continually driving or walking backwards and forwards, and what I want to know is this—supposing we were to put up for these two or three days at an inn, and supposing that inn to be the one you were talking about—the Mitre, in the High-street—how would that suit your views?"

"Do you mean it?" says Miss Peggy, with a flash of delight in her sufficiently expressive eyes: no further answer is needed.

"What *we* think of the proposal," says Queen Tita, in her grand manner, to her neighbour the budding Dramatist, "is of no consequence. Oh, no! *Our* convenience is not to be consulted in any way whatever. It is nothing that we shall have to pack up all over again, just when we were getting everything into its proper place. We pretend to go away on a boating expedition, and pass the time in inns, just because a person—a person—comes from America whose mind runs upon bygone centuries. And it is that person who is to say yes or no. Everything is to be done for *her*. *We* are not of the least account; everything is to be arranged to suit the whims of the American person."

Miss Peggy looks doubtful; she seems uncertain as to whether this remonstrance is wholly a pretence.

"I am sure," she says, regarding Queen Tita with honest eyes, "that I am quite willing to keep to the boat, if anyone wishes it—yes, and very gladly too. It will be very unfair if you allow me to interfere with what anyone else may wish, just for want of telling me."

"Peggy, don't be silly!" her hostess says abruptly, but not with much unkindness. "Why, you will be quite delighted with the old-fashionedness of the Mitre, if you are able to preserve your wits in trying to remember your way along the passages. And then, you're almost certain to see one of the University lads entertaining his friends at lunch in the coffee-room—that is very amusing—the superior airs of the host, and his directions to the waiter—the way the boys look at the wine before drinking it, and their affectation of indifference and manly self-possession. Unfortunately when they have drunk a little champagne they are apt to forget their dignity, and then they begin to chaff the waiter, and laugh rather loudly at very small jokes. I suppose we sha'n't be allowed to go and sit in the billiard-room?—that ought to be interesting."

"Then you won't really mind the trouble of packing?" asks Miss Peggy, with a pretty air of innocence.

"Goodness gracious, child, don't you understand that we shall often have to put up at an hotel, if only to get our washing done? And the Mitre is in the middle of everything; it will be a hundred times more convenient than this huddled-up caravansary. Peggy, wouldn't you like to drive out to Woodstock, and see Blenheim Park and Fair Rosamond's Well? Or, at least, to Godstow Nunnery, where she is supposed to be buried. Poor thing," says Queen Tita, absently, "I wonder whether they cut off all her beautiful hair when she entered the convent."

"Are you speaking of Fair Rosamond?" says Miss Peggy. "I thought Queen Eleanor poisoned her."

"They say not. They say she gave up all her splendour, and went into Godstow Nunnery, and lived in great penitence and piety for many years, and died and was buried there," says this learned person; and then she continues, "I don't know

how it is, but the women in history who get most of our pity and sympathy are generally the women who haven't been quite what they ought to have been. I would rather have a bit of Mary Stuart's embroidery, done by her own hand, than all the jewels Queen Elizabeth ever wore."

"Do you think that possible," says Miss Peggy, with a sudden interest—"to get a scrap of sewing, no matter how small, that Mary Queen of Scots did with her own hand? No; surely not! Why, now, to think of having a treasure like that to show! ——"

"There must be plenty of pieces, if only they could be identified," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit (who has before now expressed her own vain desires in this direction), "for she spent the long years and years of her imprisonment in doing hardly anything else, and embroidery doesn't easily perish. I should think many of the old Scotch families must have heirlooms of the kind. I wonder if Colonel Cameron would be likely to know. There, Peggy; there is an idea for you. Choose Sir Ewen Cameron to be your knight, and give him this quest——"

"But I never even heard of him," says Miss Peggy.

"Oh! we know him well enough; we'll ask him to come along, and get his commission from you. And he is a Highlander; he will do anything for a pretty face."

At this moment there was a tapping at the door, and presently another Highlander—to wit, our faithful Murdoch—appeared, to clear the table; so that the project of equipping and sending forth a nineteenth-century Sir Galahad was for the present abandoned, if it was not quite forgotten by these two crazy folk.

We had no music this evening, for everyone was busy in getting his or her things ready for going ashore on the following morning. It was during these preparations that the senior members of the party unexpectedly found a chance of having a few words together privately.

"Have these two quarrelled?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"Not that I know of."

"The formality of their manner towards each other is *rather odd after* yesterday."

"Well; if he chooses to take offence because she refused to go traiking* about the streets of Wallingford with him, she will doubless let him have his own way."

"You think that is all? I believe the mischievous wretch is playing him—and playing him very skilfully, too."

"She wouldn't take the trouble. She has been a good deal more interested in hearing about those colleges all day long."

"Well, at all events," says this tom-tit Machiavelli, "I am not very sorry that at present they are on terms of rather cool acquaintanceship. For we shall be seeing several people in Oxford; and it is as well they should understand that, although these two are with us, nothing is meant by it. I don't want to have anything happen while the girl is under my charge. Match-making is a thankless office; and I hope to get to the end of this trip with both of those two innocents quite heart-whole. Innocents? Yes, a precious pair of innocents *they* are! My private impression is that the one is as bad as the other; and if anything happens to either of them, it will be richly deserved. I shouldn't wonder if she taught him a lesson he wasn't expecting. But in the meantime ——"

"Yes?"

"In the meantime," Queen Tita says, with a laugh, "Peggy is just a little too well-behaved for me. Where's all her fun? I wanted a lively companion; she's as prim as a school-miss."

"You cannot have everything. You told her before we started that you were doubtful as to the way she might behave; and now she is showing you, from hour to hour, from day to day, that there is not a more properly conducted young lady in the whole of this land."

"Oh, yes—when she is studying English history—Magna Charta—the Barons—and so forth—and running the boat aground at the same time. Do you think I don't know why she wanted to get away and buy silk and wool this morning? '*Unter vier Augen*' is Peggy's motto. And you will see how she will befool those old fogies at Oxford to-morrow—her timid inquiries—her pretended reverence for the founders—her cour-

* *This is a* Scotch word difficult to translate accurately.

teous interest in everything; and all the time she will be perfectly aware that she is reducing some learned old Professor, or Proctor, or Doctor, to the condition of a jelly. If you could only see Peggy's face when she turns round, after having listened with the profoundest attention to some dreadful old bore ——"

"Will you stop talking about her, anyway; and take such things as you want; and get out? Duncombe will be back here in a minute."

"I tell you this," she says, as she prepares to depart with a bundle of articles enclasped in her arms, "that before Peggy has done with Mr. Duncombe, she will teach him not to speak so patronisingly about girls. He will be singing a different tune before Peggy has finished with him."

Alas for our fond desire that Miss Peggy should approach Oxford under favourable influences of weather! All that night it rained hard; in the morning it was raining hard; when we left Abingdon it was pouring in torrents. There was half-a-gale blowing, too; and no easy task was it to steer this long and unwieldy craft against the heavy current, with a stiff breeze knocking her about at the same time. A more doleful picture than that around us could hardly be conceived—the leaden and lowering sky; the dull, coffee-coloured river; the dark meadows; the dripping willows and elms and chestnuts; and yet, when Queen Tita mournfully asked if this were the merry month of May, she received her answer from the shore, for through the dismal pall of rain we could see that the slopes of Nuneham were blue with wild hyacinths.

"Bell's children," says a mite of a creature, from within the monkish cowl of her waterproof, "say that I'm always in a tempest, when I go over to drive them away from their books, and into the open air. Well, if they saw me now, they might think it was literally true."

"They call her Auntie Cyclone," Miss Peggy is informed, "and that is a very good name for her, only much too complimentary. She isn't a cyclone at all: she's only a shallow dis*turbance.*"

"Ah! did he say such things about you?" says Miss Peggy, in consolatory tones; and she even puts her hand on her friend's arm, to comfort her. But is there anything more ludicrous and ineffectual than the endeavour of two women to display sympathy or affection for each other while they are encased in waterproofs? The india-rubber seems to act as a non-conductor of kindness. Besides, their cuffs are tight, and their hands are cold, and usually there is rain running down their noses. On this occasion, Queen Tita prefers to take no notice; she merely resumes her wail about the weather.

"And just as we are coming to Iffley, too—to the mill and the bridge and the poplars that have been painted from every inch of difference of a point of view! And the river as you get near to Oxford—why, it is quite a pretty sight to see the various boats, and the barges moored by Christ Church Meadow, and all those young lads looking so brisk and healthy, and full of life and enjoyment! Well, we may get a better day before we leave Oxford."

We are not likely to encounter a worse. The rain keeps pegging away, in a steady, unmistakable, business-like fashion, as we draw nearer to those half-hidden spires among the trees. The river is quite deserted; there is not a single boat out on the swollen and rushing stream. The long row of barges, notwithstanding their gay colours and gilding and decorations, look so many pictures of misery; and would appear to be quite untenanted but that here and there a curl of smoke from a stove-pipe suggests that some solitary steward or care-taker is trying to keep himself warm. And so we get on to Salter's rafts, and secure our moorings there; while Jack Duncombe good-naturedly volunteers to remain behind and settle up with Palinurus, and see our luggage forwarded to the hotel.

In a few minutes three of us are in a cab, and driving through the wan, cold, dripping, black-grey thoroughfares. And it is little that the grave and learned seniors of those halls and colleges—and it is little that the younger Fellows, snugly ensconced in their bachelor rooms—it is very little indeed they suspect that a *certain White* Pestilence has arrived in Oxford town.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides:
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And softened sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gentle play—
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay."

WHEN, after dreary days of rain, one wakens some fine morning, and instinctively turns one's eyes towards the window, and finds that outside the blessed sunlight is pouring down on a cluster of scarlet geraniums—making the translucent petals a glory and wonder of colour—then joy rushes in upon the soul. We did not spend much time over dressing and breakfasting that morning; we were too eager to be out; and when at last we emerged from the inn, behold! all this town of Oxford had undergone a magic transformation. The grey houses had turned to yellow; over them there were masses of silver-white cloud slowly sailing through the blue; a soft, fresh wind was blowing; life and gladness were everywhere. Of course, we made straight away for Folly Bridge; and there the flooded and rapid river was glancing and shimmering in the sun; and the elms and chestnuts and poplars were all swaying and rustling in the breeze. It is true that our newly-acquired skipper and pilot—Captain Columbus, Miss Peggy had named him, on account of the unknown regions into which he was about to conduct us—as he looked down from the bridge on the swollen and rushing stream, seemed to think it would be rather a tough job to get the Nameless Barge round by the Isis to the first lock of the canal; and the young lad who was to act as driver—the Horse-Marine we proposed to call him, with reference to his double duties—was lounging about with a certain air of indifference; while *Murdoch, being* wholly ignorant of this kind of sailing, was

discreetly silent. But we were anxious to make a start; and so it was arranged that, as our women-folk had still some things to purchase (not knowing when they might see a shop again), we should go back through the town, and meet our boat later on at the beginning of the canal, if peradventure the crew were able to take her thither.

Now, whether it was that this gay morning had raised Miss Peggy's spirits, and thereby in a measure softened her heart, or whether it was that she was bent on a little wilful mischief after having played Miss Propriety—to perfection, be it said—during these past few days, she was now showing herself a good deal kinder to Jack Duncombe, and he was proportionately grateful, as he went with the women from shop to shop and carried their parcels for them. Perhaps it would be more generous to say that she was merely giving the rein to her natural good-humour—for she was a friendly kind of creature, and not apt to take offence. Anyhow, if Jack Duncombe was pleased by her marked amiability, he was not too obviously overwhelmed. If he was ready, on small encouragement, to become her slave, he wore his chains with a certain lightness of heart, or cunningly professed to do so. And this entirely won the approval of our Governor-General-in-Petticoats, who smiled benignly on them both, and seemed to think they were very good children indeed.

"Oh, yes, it's all right," she says (and, of course, she knows everything), as we are putting our traps together at the hotel. "They're only in fun. I fancied once or twice that Peggy meant serious mischief, and the way she played you off against him was very clever—oh, yes, very skilful indeed; but I really think she will let him alone now. I suppose she sees that she could do for him if she chose, and that is enough for Peggy. Besides, she has had a fair turn at it these last few days."

"Why, you said yourself to her last night that she had behaved herself perfectly!"

"So she did; it wasn't her fault that the men made idiots of themselves. I wonder if that Mr. A'Becket will really come out to see us to-morrow. I shouldn't be a bit surprised; but

as for his overtaking us by walking along the canal-bank—well, I know what that meant—that was to give Peggy the notion that he was a tremendous athlete, and could do his five miles an hour with perfect ease. An athlete—in a black frock coat with long tails, and his hat on the back of his head!"

"My dear, when intellect bulges out a man's forehead, so that he has to wear his hat on the back of his head, it is not a matter for scorn, but for reverence. Mr. A'Becket is a Fellow of his college. He has written several letters to the *Times* on the important subject of Elementary Education. His 'Critical Studies of the Cartesian Philosophy' are read and admired wherever—wherever—well, wherever they are to be found."

"He has got long front teeth, and his eyes are like boiled gooseberries," she says, with the maddening irrelevance of womankind; and that ends the discussion.

We went to the Canal Company's office to get our permit, and then walked along to the first lock—a little toy-box kind of basin it looked; and there we loitered about for a while in expectation of the Nameless Barge making its appearance. Time passed, and there was no sign. Of course it was all very well for those young people to be placidly content with this delay, and to heed nothing so long as they could stroll up and down in the sunlight and the blowing winds—her eyes from time to time showing that he was doing his best to amuse her; but more serious people, who had been reading in the morning papers of the hurricanes and inundations that had recently prevailed over the whole country, and whose last glimpse of the Isis was of a yellow-coloured stream rushing like a mill-race, began to be anxious. Accordingly, it was proposed, and unanimously agreed, that we should make our way back along the river-bank, to gain some tidings.

When, at length, we came in sight of our gallant craft and her composite crew, we found that Captain Columbus was making preparations for getting her under a bridge, and also that about half the population of Oxford had come out to see the performance. When we looked at the low arch, and at the *headstrong current*, it was with no feelings of satisfaction;

nevertheless we all embarked, to see what was about to happen, and Murdoch took the tiller, while the tow-rope was passed to the Horse-Marine. Now, we should have run no serious risk but for this circumstance: half of the bridge had recently fallen down, and the authorities, instead of rebuilding it, had contented themselves with blocking up the roadway. Accordingly, when, as we had almost expected, the Nameless Barge got caught under the arch, we found the masonry just above our heads displaying a series of very alarming cracks; and the question was as to which of those big blocks, loosened by the friction of the boat, would come crashing down on us. However, the worst that befell us was that we got our eyes filled with dust and our hands half-flayed with the gritty stone; eventually we were dragged through, and towed to a place of seclusion, where we could have our lunch in peace, the populace having been left behind by that opportune obstruction.

And that was but the beginning of our new experiences; for when—Columbus and the Horse-Marine having reappeared—we went on to the first lock of the canal, we found the toy-basin so narrow that we had to detach our fenders before we could enter. Then came another bridge that had almost barred our way by reason of the lowness of the arch. And that again was as nothing to the succeeding bridges we encountered as we got into the open country—drawbridges that had to be tilted up by hand, their rough beams hanging over us at an angle, and threatening to tear the roof off our floating house. Nevertheless, we managed to get on somehow, and these recurrent delays and difficulties only served to give variety and incident to our patient progress. Fortunately, the weather befriended us, though there was too much of an April look about. There were dazzling white clouds, and ominous purple ones; there were dashes of deep blue sky; bursts of vivid sunlight sweeping over the level landscape; buttercups and marigolds nodding here and there in the marshes. A Constable day; but without waterproofs, luckily. Queen Tita remarked that it was no wonder England excelled in landscape

art, for no other country was possessed of so much weather, and the painters got every possible chance.

We passed the quiet little hamlet of Woolvercot, the only living creatures visible being some white geese on the green; and shortly thereafter we stopped our noble vessel for a second or two, and got out for a stroll along the tow-path. And a very pleasant stroll it was; the air was soft and sweet, the sunlight was more general now, and lay warmly on the hawthorn hedges and the grassy banks. Of course, Miss Peggy was busy with her study of English wild-flowers; and the young man who seemed rather glad to be her attendant did what he could to assist her; and as she got together wild hyacinths, and primroses, and speedwells, and forget-me-nots, and Rosalind's "daisies pied and violets blue," she sometimes hummed or whistled a bit of the "Green Bushes" tune that had apparently got into her head.

"I sha'n't forget to write out that song for you," said her companion—as if the assurance was needed!

"I think I know the air," she answered, "if you will kindly give me the words."

"Oh, you'd better let me write out the whole thing complete," he said. "Some day or other you may come across it, when you are away in America; and then it may remind you of this trip—and of some English friends," he made bold to add.

"I am not likely to forget either," said Miss Peggy, quietly and without any embarrassment. Indeed, the relations that now existed between these two—for the moment, at least—were such as to command universal approval. She was kind to him, but not over kind; while he was very attentive to her, but in a modest and respectful way. What, then, had become of the rather patronising air with which he had spoken of our Peggy, before he had ever set eyes on her? There was remarkably little of that now. Miss Peggy had quickly enough taught him "his place"; and though he was as eager and gay and talkative as ever, and as full of all kinds of literary and dramatic projects, which he recklessly intermixed with the *sober and steady* business of our sailing, still there was always

something in his manner towards Miss Peggy that showed that "patronage" was far from being in his mind.

It turned out a clear and golden afternoon; and the westering light lay softly on the foliage of the willows and elms, on the wide and silent meadows where the cattle were, and on the banks nearer us that were yellow with buttercups.

"Why," says our young American friend, turning round for a moment, "this is not the least like what I expected. You would never think this was a canal—it is more like an exceedingly pretty and peaceful river. I thought a canal was a grimy place; and that we should have a good deal of rough company—indeed, I was quite prepared to put cotton-wool in my ears. But this is just beautiful; and we have it all to ourselves."

"The canals are grimy enough in some places," one says to her, "especially in the north; but we shall avoid these, as far as possible, and take you through nothing but primrose and cowslip country, so that you may fancy yourself Chloe, or Daphne, or Phœbe, and weave posies for yourself all day long, if you like. As for rough company, we don't seem to have company of any kind; and even if you were to hear some of the Birmingham lads giving each other a dose of 'damson-pie'—that is the polite name they have for it—you wouldn't understand a single sentence. So you needn't be afraid, Miss Peggy. If you want to play Rosalind in the forest, it is all around you. And if there is no one to hang up verses about you on the trees, then it speaks ill for those young men of Oxford."

"Do you expect Mr. A'Becket to come and see us, Peggy?" asks Mrs. Threepenny-bit in a casual kind of way.

Miss Peggy glances rather swiftly at Jack Duncombe (who is quite imperturbable), and makes answer—

"How can I know? He is your friend."

"That was really a beautiful basket of roses he brought you yesterday afternoon," her hostess again remarks.

"I have just given them to Murdoch," the young lady says, with much simplicity. "They ought to look very pretty on the dinner-table."

And not only was Miss Peggy surprised and charmed by

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the pastoral character of this portion of her voyage, but also she was much interested in our getting through the locks. These rude little wooden boxes seemed to have been left for us years and years ago; and as there was no one in charge of them, nor any living creature visible near them, we had to open and shut them for ourselves, thereby getting a sufficient amount of occupation and exercise. Jack Duncombe, of course, was chief engineer on such occasions, co-operating with the Captain; and it is well to allow young men of superfluous energy to have their way, especially when there is a fair spectator looking on whose favour they wish to obtain. Indeed, young Duncombe had been so obliging all day—so dexterous, and indefatigable, and full of resource when we were in any small difficulties—that we thought him entitled to some consideration at the hands of our pretty Miss Peggy. And as for the man in the long coat, with his hat on the back of his head? Well, he might walk his five miles an hour till he was blue in the face, but there was no opinionated metaphysician going to make any part of the voyage with us. We should take care of that.

Whether the little hamlet of Hampton Gay is so called in remembrance of certain historical high jinks, or whether it obtained its name from the prevailing character of its people, we could not learn; and all that we saw of the place was an odd little church spire peeping up from among the trees. Almost immediately thereafter we came to a lock, and, having passed through that, emerged into the swift-flowing and osiered Cherwell. Here abundant evidence of the recent floods was all around us—wide stretches of meadow had been turned into a continuous lake, with nothing to be seen but pollard-willows and half-submerged masses of marsh-marigold; the tow-path was under water, as our young friend Murdoch, being ashore, discovered to his cost, for he had to pick and splash his way along, while Columbus and the Horse-Marine had mounted their gallant steed and rode secure; and the Cherwell itself was coming down in extraordinary volume and with tremendous force. In fact, as this is a quite candid history, the writer of it will here confess—for the guidance of anyone who may attempt

a similar expedition—that he was very nearly being the death of all those members of the party who happened to be afloat. Steering at the time, and observing that the heaviest rush of the river was along the western shore, he naturally thought he could cheat the current by edging out towards mid-stream, and proceeded to do so with all imaginary caution. But the moment the heavy weight of water got a grip of the bow, the boat was twisted round, so that the full force of the stream bore down upon her broadside on; while the strain of the tow-rope, acting at this awkward angle, proceeded to tilt us over in a very alarming fashion. It was an affair of only a moment or two; for by jamming the tiller over she was presently righted; and beyond a scream from the women, and a ghastly rattle of crockery in Murdoch's pantry, nothing happened. But it convinced us of two things: first, that it was well for us that the Nameless Barge had been constructed below on the lines of an ordinary boat, instead of being a flat-bottomed punt; and, secondly, that the steersman of a vessel that is being towed by a horse should not try to be too clever when the stream is in heavy flood.

We were now to understand why it was we had come so far without encountering a single canal-barge. We arrived at a lock where there was quite a company of them congregated there for the night, afraid to face that furious current—or, rather, not afraid of facing it, but of being carried down by it, to the destruction of all proper steering-way. And where was the griminess of these barges, now that we were amongst them? They were uncommonly smart, we thought. They were gay with landscapes painted in brilliant hues of scarlet and white, and yellow and purple—comprising Italian villas, cascades, snow-peaks, mountain bridges, and all kinds of romantic things; and there was a sententious simplicity about their names—"The Staff of Life," "Live and Learn," and so forth. As for the people, they seemed a quiet and civil folk; the men lent us a helping hand in getting through; the women, who were tidily furnished with head-gear, if their faces seemed hardened by exposure to wind and weather, eyed us as we

passed with a natural curiosity; while some of the small fry popped out their heads to have a look.

"Poor little wretches!" says Queen Tita. "I hope they are not worried much by the school-inspectors. At all events, their life ought to be a good deal wholesomer and happier than the life of children in the London slums. They must get fresh air—in the daytime, at least; and they must get to know all about country things. Do you remember the story of the bird's-nest being taken into a ward in a children's hospital in London, and not one of the poor little things able to tell what it was? They call for education and education, and they cram a lot of useless stuff into small brains that only get stupified by it; and then you take some poor little fellow out into the country, and he can't tell the difference between a buttercup and a dandelion; and a sheep frightens him; and a mile's walking tires him ——"

"Madam, will you please to speak less disrespectfully," one of us interposes, "of a system that has been established by the collective wisdom of the country? I tell you that by means of education you can do everything ——"

"Except teach people how to live."

"If you want to see what education can do, look at America ——"

"At America!" she says (for Peggy is not within hearing at the moment)—"at America—that makes no shame of walking away with the surplus of the Alabama money buttoned up in its pocket! I suppose that is the effect of education on the national conscience?"

"I tell you again that you do not understand the blessings of education. Why don't you consult some capable authority, and have your invincible ignorance removed? Why don't you consult Mr. Algernon A'Becket now ——"

"Mr. Algernon A'Becket!" she says. But she stops short, for here comes Miss Peggy; and of course her innocent mind is not to be prejudiced against any person (whatever may be the colour of his eyes or the peculiarity of his front teeth) who *has shown* an exceptional interest in her.

Meanwhile, we had sailed once more into the silences; and the clear and golden afternoon had become a clear and golden evening; and the wide sheets of water, lying along the meadows, shone with a glory that the eyes could hardly bear. And perhaps it was that dazzling light, and the beautiful colour in the higher heavens, and our own solitariness, that made Queen Tita say, rather wistfully—

"I could almost think we were lying becalmed in Loch-na-Keal, and looking out to the west—to Little Colonsay, and Staffa, and the Dutchman. Ah! Peggy; we have something to show you yet before you go back home!"

"More beautiful than this?" says the girl; for she is a contented creature, and happy in her surroundings, whatever they may be. "But it isn't fair to ask you. Why, you are just like Murdoch. Do you know what he did yesterday? He had got a newspaper sent him from Scotland, from some friend of his; and he brought it to me, and showed me an advertisement of a yacht for sale—a full description of it—and he wanted me to take it to you and persuade you to either buy or hire her for the autumn. He did not say anything against this trip; but you could see what he was thinking."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I told him I could hardly do that, for it would look as if I were asking you to take me with you."

"But will you come, Peggy?" immediately and eagerly asks this brazen piece of audacity, who seems to assume that whenever she and any girl-friend of hers—who happens to have pretty eyes, and pretty ways, and a weakly-pretended contempt for men—choose to plan out a further holiday for themselves, a yacht must be provided for them forthwith, irrespective of the trifling question of cost. Fortunately, Miss Peggy has a little more common-sense.

"Don't tempt me," she says. "From the way you speak of all those places, I know it must be just beyond anything. But the 'old folks at home' will be thinking I have been away long enough. And, besides, it isn't wise to exhaust all your pleasures at once. You will let me look forward to going with you some

day, to your pet places; and it will be something to think about, and dream about, when I am thousands of miles away from you."

"Well, that is a bargain, Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and she puts her hand within the girl's arm. "Whenever you have the opportunity of coming with us for a month, or two months, in the summer or autumn, we will go on a yachting cruise together—and then you will see something. For I consider you have been a very good girl, and quite a pattern of behaviour, and I will give you a certificate of character whenever you want it."

Now, what moved Miss Peggy, almost directly thereafter, to the following piece of mischief? The present writer is convinced that it was simply the transparent honesty of the girl, who knew well enough that she was not deserving of the praise bestowed on her, and was resolved to amend Mrs. Threepenny-bit's too high estimate of her. When the elder of the two women said—

"Come along, Peggy; I see Murdoch is lighting the candles—we must get ready for dinner ——"

Miss Peggy, instead of immediately following, lingered for a moment.

"Have you got the little cigar-cutter I gave you?" she said, in a rapid undertone.

"I should think I have!"

"Can't you fasten it on again to your watch-chain?

"In a kind of a way."

"Well, do! I want you to wear it at dinner. You'll see something."

A little while thereafter, in obedience to Murdoch's summons, we found ourselves taking our places at table; and the first thing we discovered was that Miss Peggy had had time to change her dress, and now wore a very pretty and simple costume that seemed to suit her excellently well. Of some slightly roughish material it was, and cream-white, with vertical blue stripes; and at the neck, just underneath the plain linen collar, there was a band of dark blue velvet. It was on this *dark band* that there gleamed conspicuous an oblong silver

ornament, which the person sitting next her instantly recognised as a pencil-case ingeniously set as a brooch. The jeweller in Oxford deserved credit for this piece of workmanship; and certainly he could not have been long over it.

For the first few minutes the trinket remained unnoticed; but presently Queen Tita's attention was caught by it; and at once she put down the spoon she held in her hand.

"Well, upon my word!" she exclaimed. "Before my very eyes! Did you ever see such disgraceful effrontery?"

And then she glanced across the table.

"And look at the other one!—look what he has at his watch-chain!" she says to Jack Duncombe. "Did you ever see such shamelessness in a Christian country? I wish my two sons were here—they wouldn't see their mother insulted——"

"But I have only done what you yourself suggested!" says Miss Peggy, with an air of simple wonder that was beautiful to behold. "Don't you remember it was your own suggestion?—and I thought it was so kind of you and so clever of you to think of it ——"

"Yes; and why the secrecy? Why the sneaking out in Oxford, and never a word said about it? Why the conspiracy to spring a surprise on us?"

"But you had so many things to attend to in Oxford that I thought I needn't bother you with my small affairs," says Miss Peggy; and the perfect candour of her eyes would have bamboozled an Old Bailey lawyer out of his wits.

"Your small affairs, you wretch! Do you think you can impose on me with your pretended innocence?"

"Don't you pay any attention to them, Miss Peggy," one of us says to her. "What do they understand about faithfulness and devotion? I suppose they thought, when they took you away from the simple pleasures of the country, and plunged you into the wild whirl of gaieties at Oxford ——"

"Tea and talk!" says Peggy.

"— that you would forsake old friends. When they led you away through dazzling halls, and would distract you with a thousand *revelries*, they little dreamed that there was still

constancy in your heart. How could they know that one always returns—no matter what comes between—to one's first loves?"

"I wonder how many you would have to return to, if you began," says Queen Tita, spitefully.

"They fancied that the sympathy between two kindred souls was to be destroyed by three and a half days' gallivanting about Oxford! And callous and unfeeling worldlings might think so too; but we will show them something different; we will be a lesson to them; our constancy will be celebrated in legend and ballad ——"

"Yes," says Miss Peggy, with eyes cast down. "'And out of her grave there grew a red rose; and out of her knight's a sweetbriar.'"

"Precisely so. I know they will quote us in song and story, as a shining example:—

'Jeunesse trop coquette,
Ecoutez la leçon
Que vous fait Henriette,
Et son amant Damon'."

"Are you listening to them?" says Queen Tita to her neighbour, in awe-struck tones.

"Yes," says Jack Duncombe, "it *does* sound a little improper."

"And to think that a simple Highland lad like Murdoch should be coming and going—I wonder what his opinion is ——"

As the simple Highland lad happened to come in at this moment, she had to stop her envious chatter; and was fain to turn to her companion with some idle request that he should pass the salt.

All this time, it must be remembered, we were steadily and silently gliding through the now fast darkening country As to where we were, or where we should pass the night, we had not the remotest idea. For one thing, our studies of Ordnance Survey maps had at least taught us this—that canals are not as other highways. The ancient highways, such as rivers and *roads, have had* centuries and centuries to draw population to

them, so that the life of a district is mostly visible there; while the chief modern line of communication, the railway, has generally been engineered so as to pick up any considerable villages in its course. But the peculiar difficulties in the construction of canals have, in the majority of instances, prevented their projectors from doing much beyond aiming at the chief objective points; so that, when you leave one of these—such as Oxford, or Napton, or Warwick, or Rugby, as a rule you find yourself going through districts that are apparently uninhabited. If a foreigner were to see England in this way, he would find it hard to give credence to the familiar statistics about the relative proportion of population to area in this and other countries. Of course, it mattered nothing to us whether we were near a village or not. We had our house with us, and were well content to be without neighbours. Our only concern was that Captain Columbus, the horse, and the Horse-Marine should find quarters for the night; and as Columbus professed himself well acquainted with the Oxford Canal, at least, we had no immediate anxiety on that score.

Dinner over, Jack Duncombe, without any entreaty or apology, handed Miss Peggy her banjo; and she, good-naturedly, took that proceeding as a matter of course. First of all, to try the strings, she played the "Daisy" clog-dance, which met with much approval. Then she said—

"Did you ever hear the tragic story of Dinah Snow?"

We had never heard it.

"Well, I will sing it to you; and you must all join in the chorus, mind. This is the chorus."

She played a few notes of prelude—that at once struck us as strangely familiar—and beautiful, too—and then she sang—

> "O my witching Dinah Snow, O my witching Dinah Snow,
> She met her death by drowning in the river Ohio".

"But wait a minute, Peggy," interposes Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in considerable wonderment. "Why, that's 'The Wearing of the Green'!"

"Of course it is," says Miss Peggy, complacently.

"What a shame!"

"I don't see that. I suppose no one knows what were the words originally sung to those old airs ——"

"Quite right—hear, hear!" Peggy's faithful ally ventures to put in.

"And the story of Dinah Snow is as pathetic as anything you could wish for. Now, listen; and don't forget the chorus."

We began to think that Miss Peggy was making a fool of us on this occasion; for, although she sang the song with much feeling, still there was a curious ingenuousness about the words which provoked doubt. What could one make of this?—

> "'Twas a dark and dreary night, the stormy winds did blow,
> She went on board the horse-boat to cross the Ohio;
> The waves ran high, and in the deep her graceful form did go,
> The river's cold embrace received my pretty Dinah Snow."

This piece of literature, it must be confessed, puzzled us; and it is just possible that Miss Peggy might have been sharply brought to task for singing a comic song to one of the finest of the old Irish airs, had she not put such evident good faith into her rendering of it. So we all, in such dulcet tones as Heaven had dealt to us, bewailed the fate of poor Dinah Snow; and then, mercifully to cheer us up a bit, our pretty Peggy sang, "There's a happy little home down in Southern Tennessee," and several others that we had established as favourites since she first came among us with her banjo and her audacious ways.

Now, it has been observed that Queen Tita is easily taken captive by a contralto voice; and when the girl ceased for a moment or so, she said:

"Peggy, I wish you were 'a wave of the sea'—you remember the nice things that were said to Perdita; and that you could go on for ever. And it's awfully good of you to have brought your banjo with you. What should we do to show our gratitude to you? Would you like a testimonial? Or a vote of thanks?"

Instantly there is a flash of wicked triumph in Miss Peggy's eyes.

"May I wear this brooch, then?" she asks.

But the little woman is equal to the occasion.

"That brooch?" she answers, with much indifference. "Why, of course. What do I care? He may give a brooch to every woman in the country, for anything it matters to me. And you needn't suppose you are the only favoured one," she adds, with a perfectly gratuitous malice.

"At all events, I know the sort of brooch you should wear," one says to her. "It ought to have dark blue stones in it. And then one could call you Sapphira with impunity, and with truth."

"In the meantime," says Mr. Jack Duncombe, not without some reason, "don't you think we should ask Columbus whether he has any notion where he is going to find lodgings for the night? It must be getting late; and they can't go wandering about the country in the dark, searching for a public-house and a stable."

So therewithal the young man rose and went outside. But he had not been gone a second when he returned.

"If you will come out now," he said, "you will see the most surprisingly beautiful thing you ever saw in your life, I believe. And you needn't wrap up," he considerately added to the womenfolk; "the air is quite soft and mild."

Nevertheless, they lingered for a moment to put some slight shawl or kerchief round their head or shoulders; and then they passed out from the saloon on to the piece of deck at the prow. And, indeed, it was no wonder they were struck wholly silent by the marvellous scene they now found all around them. In the cloudless, violet-hued heavens there shone a full golden moon; jet black were the trees and bushes near us, and also the shadow along the bank; but the surface of the canal, away behind us, was of a pale and mystic grey; and that, again, was broken by the divergent ripples we left in our wake, each of these ripples catching the moonlight and becoming a line of quivering fire. This boat, indeed, stealing through the silence and the mysterious dusk, seemed like some great white moth, with long and sinuous wings of silver; and the creature had red eyes, too—for the windows were lit; and noiselessly it crept on beneath the black overhanging boughs. The *whole thing* was very ghostly; it sounded quite pleasant

to hear the cheerful voice of Captain Columbus, whom we could scarcely make out in the shadow of the trees, return assurances that he knew perfectly well where he was, and would soon bring us to our moorings for the night.

Nevertheless, it was some little time thereafter before we were finally made fast, and saw the dark figures of the two men and the horse disappear along the grey tow-path, leaving us to the silence of this perfect moonlight night. As to where we were we had not the faintest notion; nor did it matter one jot. Jack Duncombe and the writer of these pages considered they might profitably smoke their final cigar outside, and Queen Tita and Miss Peggy, the latter with her banjo, were so kind as to come and sit in the stern-sheets with us.

"On a night like this," said our young American friend, "isn't it a pity we haven't some beautiful music; the tinkling of a banjo spoils everything."

"Peggy," said Queen Tita, putting her hand on the girl's arm for a moment, "sing 'My old Kentucky home'."

Thereupon Miss Peggy—who is the soul of good-nature when there is no mischievous project in her head—took up her banjo, and began to sing, and very well did her rich contralto voice sound in the stillness of these slumbering woods and fields. One could not help wondering what some belated rustic would have thought of it all if he had chanced upon us on his way home: the black trees and the grey canal showing no sign of life; that spectral white thing moored in there among the willows, with its motionless points of red fire; the silence all around absolute but for the strange singing of a woman's voice.

Well, it was a pleasant night; and I don't know how late we sat up, or did not sit up. We felt very much alone, and yet, somehow or other, we were not greatly discontented with our solitude.

CHAPTER IX,

"Marie Hamilton to the Kirk is gane,
Wi' ribbons on her breist:
The King thocht mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than he listened to the priest.

"Marie Hamilton to the Kirk is gane,
Wi' ribbons in her hair:
The King thocht mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than onie that were there.

"Marie Hamilton to the Kirk is gane
Wi' gloves upon her hands:
And the King thocht mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than the Queen and a' her lands."

It was hard that such a perfect night should be succeeded by a wild and blustering morning; the rain was rattling on our house-roof; there was a wail of wind through the swaying and dripping bushes and trees. In the midst of all this turmoil, Captain Columbus suddenly makes his appearance, emerging from the vague regions of unknown space; and, with serious aspect, he informs us that we cannot go any further at present. The authorities, it appears, lock the canal gates every second Sunday—perhaps with a view of forcing on the floating population at least a chance of going to church: and it is this second Sunday we happen to have hit on. Queen Tita, of course, is far from being disappointed. She highly approves of stopping the traffic every second Sunday; and doubtless would have the regulation extended to every Sunday, if she had the power. And as for our own nondescript crew, she distinctly objects to having them labour on the day of rest.

"I quite agree with you," says Jack Duncombe (he generally does agree with her, for reasons of his own). "The seventh day's rest is good for everybody all round. I remember, one night at dinner, a young parson was going on about the

necessity of Sunday as an institution, and one of the girls of the house said, 'Yes, of course; if it wasn't for Sunday, how should we ever find the missing tennis-balls?' But I wonder what we are to do here?"

"Can't we go to church?" says Miss Peggy, ingenuously. "If we were to find a road, and keep to it, we should be sure to come to a church somewhere."

It turned out, however, that this search for a simple rustic service did not seem to commend itself to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, whose sympathies rather incline to cathedral aisles, and mystic-hued windows, and the hushed, clear singing of an invisible choir: besides which, she detests, as a cat would, walking along muddy roads. Indeed, we had just begun to think of settling down to a hopelessly idle day, when Captain Columbus again presented himself, and with far more alarming news—in fact, he had become a kind of stormy petrel on this wild morning. The latest piece of intelligence was that the local experts (where did he find any in this solitary district?) were of opinon that it was quite impracticable for us to get our boat under a certain small bridge a little way further along. Of course this was a contingency to be faced, and at once. If the information was correct, it meant our immediate return to Oxford, and a stay there of probably a week, while the Nameless Barge was having two or three inches taken off the height of her house. Accordingly, orders were given that, without waiting to send for the horse, they should themselves haul the boat along to this alleged obstruction, that we might know our fate forthwith.

In a venerable book of jests, the title of which the present writer has forgotten, there is a story told of a Dutch toll-keeper who dreamed a dream of the Day of Judgment, himself and his neighbours being summoned to give an account of themselves, and then being sent to the left hand among the goats, or to the right hand among the sheep, as their merits deserved. Several of his fellow toll-keepers having been sent among the goats for their iniquitous exactions, Jacob Schmæven, somewhat after this fashion, relates what happened to himself: "*Then the* Lord said to me, 'Stand before me, Schmæven.

Schmæven, you take too much toll.' 'Yes, Lord,' I said, 'I take too much toll—but from the rich people only, and not from the poor.' Then the Lord said, 'Friend Schmæven, you may go to the right hand among the sheep—but let me tell you it is a tam tight squeeze!'" We found the phrase most appositely descriptive of our passage under this wretched little bridge. Such pushing, and hauling, and canting, and righting there was!—and all the while flying showers were driving past; the wind was whistling through the trees, and drawing out the branches of the willows like long streamers of witches' hair; and the silver-grey breadths of water in the meadows were darkened to a leaden hue as the successive gusts bore heavily down upon them. But through the bridge we eventually did get; and, as further progress was impossible for that day, we allowed Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine to go back to Oxford, if they should be lucky enough to strike a railway station somewhere; and when they were gone away—having been intrusted by Murdoch with sundry commissions, chiefly on account of breakage—we were once more left to ourselves in this remote and rain-beaten region.

Suddenly, through the chaos of sounds without there came another—the faint and distant tolling of a bell. Miss Peggy quickly looked up from her writing.

"Mr. Duncombe, there must be a church somewhere not so far away. Don't you think we could find it?"

"Certainly," said he, with the greatest alacrity—for these two had never had an excursion together before. "If you will put on thick boots and a waterproof, I will undertake to find out where the church is."

"In a moment, then, when I have finished my letter," said she; and presently she had gone away to get ready.

And then the extraordinary care that had to be taken of her, and the precautions, and the anxious advice, when she returned to the saloon! You would have thought she was made of Venetian spun glass, or Genoese pastry, or Sèvres china, by the way he went on. Was she quite sure that her boots were *thick-soled*? Her waterproof ought certainly to

have been three inches longer: wouldn't she try whether she could wear his, and he would take his ulster? Well, if she didn't care to do that, hadn't she some smaller bonnet that would allow the hood to come well over, so as to be strapped down round her ears? At the next big town we should reach, he said, he would get her a deer-stalker's cap, and show her how admirably that fitted into the hood of a waterproof, to keep the wind from whistling about her head. Would she entrust him with a spare pair of gloves, that he could give her on reaching the church porch, and then her hands wouldn't feel damp and miserable during the service? To one of us it appeared pretty certain that this was not the first time Mr. Jack Duncombe had ministered to a young lady's comfort; but anyhow Miss Peggy was apparently very grateful to him—though once or twice there was a look in her eyes that seemed to say she was a little bit amused by his assiduous care of her. Then these two set forth from the ark to see whether they could find any resting place for the soles of their feet.

While our young friends were away, the loneliness of our situation was naturally intensified; our sole companions were the speedwells and daisies and forget-me-nots along the bank, and the swaying willows and flooded meadows beyond. Oddly enough, though the weather brightened up from time to time, there was not a bird singing anywhere; whereas, along the Thames, whenever a shower ceased, there was a burst of music filling all the air. In what various functions of reading and letter-writing we passed that morning needs not to be described; but when at length we heard voices without, and presently beheld Miss Peggy's bright and smiling face at the door of the saloon, it cannot truthfully be said that the interruption was unwelcome.

She had come back in excellent spirits, after the buffeting the rain and wind had given her; and all during luncheon she was very talkative and merry, while her eyes were sometimes quicker than her words in flashing out her meaning, or showing that she was alive to everything that was going on, whether in jest or earnest. It was the first time she had been in a small *village church* in this country.

"For one thing," she said, "I am glad to find that the Horse-Marine wasn't making fun of me yesterday. I was watching what they were doing on the bank; and he was talking to Columbus; and he said something about going 'right back into the ta-own'. Well, I thought it wasn't very civil of him to mock my Yankee pronunciation before my very face; and I said to myself that I would have it out with the young man before he was many days older. But this morning in church I found I had been mistaken. I heard the children in the choir say as plainly as possible—'Glory be to the Father, and ta-o the Son'; and I came to the conclusion that the Horse-Marine hadn't been mocking me at all."

"Of course he hadn't," one says to her. "If only you keep your ears open you'll hear plenty of American pronunciation and plenty of what are called Americanisms as you go through these country districts. Perhaps you didn't notice how Columbus greeted his acquaintances on the barges last night? —'How do?' he said to each one of them. And as we were coming away from the lock, when he nodded good-bye to a friend he had been talking to, he said, 'So long!' Both of these are supposed to be Americanisms, aren't they?"

"It's very hard," says Peggy, reflectively, "that I am not allowed to use the least little bit of American slang—it is so clever sometimes, and means such a lot. Any English girl I meet may use those smart little phrases, when she is among her own friends, and everybody understands she only does it for fun ——"

"And why may not you?"

"Because if I did, people would say American girls ordinarily talked like that."

"People would say? What people?"

"The English people," answers Miss Peggy, simply.

"You may believe this, that the English people are no such microcephalous jackasses. Why, our Bell is quite delighted when she gets hold of another Westernism; but of course that is amongst ourselves; she doesn't trumpet her newly acquired knowledge from the housetops."

All the same Miss Peggy shakes her head.

"People are so stupid," she says; "and I have the credit of my country to keep up."

"Then please don't consider us as people," one says to her finally; "and talk in any way you like so long as you are on board this boat. It isn't in neighbourhoods like this, surely, that you need be afraid of what people will say!"

In wet weather, and during the day-time, we had agreed that there should be no smoking in the saloon; so presently two of us found ourselves outside, in the stern-sheets, where there was some kind of shelter from the driving wind and drizzle.

"Do you know, that is a remarkably nice girl!" says our young Dramatist, with sudden emphasis, as soon as we are shut out of hearing.

"Indeed!"

"She is, really. She has been telling me all about herself this morning, and about her family; and I seem to know the whole lot, and all her surroundings. Of course, on a boating expedition of this kind you get to understand people so much better. A single day's constant companionship makes you better acquainted than a hundred chance meetings during a London season ——"

"Yes. I have heard young people say that before, on board a yacht. It was generally when the girl was good-looking that this intimate acquaintance was insisted on."

"Oh, it isn't only that she is pretty," observes the young man, ingenuously. "I call her uncommonly clever. She isn't a fool, by any means. Oh, no. I tell you, you have to be on your guard; she knows more than you think."

"She knows more about *you* than you think," is one's inward comment; but our young friend continues—

"She puzzled me this morning, though, for a bit. You remember she was writing a letter before we went out."

"I believe she was."

"Well, as we were going along, she asked me if we were likely to come across a post-office. I said I didn't know, but that at any rate we could get the letter posted for her to-morrow *morning.* She said that wouldn't do at all; she must post it

herself; it was a compact she had made before leaving America that she should write every Sunday, and post the letter with her own hand. Of course, I jumped to the natural conclusion. Indeed, I reflected that a bright and attractive girl like that was sure to be engaged—though I had never heard any of you speak of it. I can't say that I was particularly disappointed: it was none of my business; still, you know, you rather prefer to fancy that the girl you're talking to is quite heart-whole."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, yes; you don't want to imagine that all the time she is listening to you she is in reality thinking of some beast of a man somewhere else. However, it was no business of mine; no; I rather hoped she would tell me something about him, as she had been telling me so much about her people. Fact is, I looked upon myself as rather a generous and noble-hearted personage—resolved to find out a post-office so that a letter might be sent away to some idiot of a fellow in New York. But, after all, it was for her sister."

"Really!"

"Yes. Her sister Emily. She's at school at Brooklyn. She is only fourteen; but tall for her age; and these two are great chums; and when Miss Rosslyn left America, each of them promised to write to the other every Sunday, and post the letter with her own hand ——"

"No matter whether the post-offices were open or not."

"Oh, I got the people to take it—I managed that," says the young man, complacently; then he continues his garrulous talk, all upon one subject: "I wonder if her own countrymen would quite like to hear the way she speaks about England and the people over here. She is not ungrateful for kindness, that is one thing certain; and she doesn't conceal her opinion about the exalted merits and virtues of her friends. And isn't she frank, too, about the circumstances of her family? Well, she found that I knew part of her story before, and so she spoke freely enough. I rather fancy her father may have kept her abroad all this while in order to see whether he *couldn't pull round* a little, and make it easier for her to

bear the change when she goes back. Not that it would matter much to her, judging by the way she talks; she is very sensible about it; and you can see how simply and inexpensively she dresses, though she is always particularly neat. Just imagine the situation of those two partners out there—companions from boyhood almost, and then associated in business most of their lives; and suddenly the one is beggared, while the other remains a man of wealth. Fortunately, from what I can gather, the collapse of Mr. Rosslyn's speculations hasn't affected the credit of the firm; the other partner is known to be a solid man; so that the Rosslyn family should, in course of time, get fairly right again, if they can't be as rich as they were. I don't know why she should have told me so much—well, I was asking her, if she was so fond of England, why she didn't stay here altogether, and then she began and told me how they were all situated at home, when once she discovered that I had got most of the story from you."

"You must have employed your time diligently, both going and coming."

"We did not hurry back, you know."

"You did not. You kept luncheon half-an-hour late."

"Well, she is really a very interesting girl," he says, by way of apology.

"As an ethnological curiosity, yes. I understand your interest in her to be purely scientific. Have you discovered any racial peculiarities yet?"

"I believe the wet weather has got at my cigars; this is a perfect brute," he says, knitting his brows. "Oh, as to the probable origin of her family? Well, that is of little consequence. The girl herself is sufficiently attractive—when you get to understand how she is situated—and how she regards things, and her opinions and so forth ——"

"What kind of a clergyman did you find there this morning?"

"Oh, the usual kind. Her sister Emily is extraordinarily *fond of her, and* will hardly let any of the others go near her *when she is at home.* It is the Emily one who is considered

to be the beauty of the family; so I suppose she must be something to look at, rather!"

"Do you think Miss Rosslyn so pretty, then?"

"Why, don't you?" he says, with an innocent air of surprise.

"That is neither here nor there. Did you have a good sermon this morning?"

"Yes, good enough, I dare say. You know Miss Rosslyn's waterproof isn't as efficient as it ought to be; and all we could do we couldn't get the hood to keep properly up. The consequence was that she got her hair pretty well wet and blown about; and although she stopped in the porch and tried to dry it a little with her handkerchief, it was considerably bedraggled as she was sitting in the pew. And, do you know, it really looked prettier than ever; there were dark and light strands in it—some almost golden, and some a beautiful brown: really it was quite pretty to look at."

"You seem to have been much edified by this morning's service," one remarks in a casual kind of way.

"But, I say," continues young Shakespeare, "you don't actually mean that there is a chance of that pretentious prig, A'Becket, coming along? He isn't a friend of yours, is he?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Then why should he tack himself on to a small private party, such as we make at present?" demands the young man, rather indignantly.

"Why? Well, when you are introduced to anyone at a friend's house, and he chooses to make himself agreeable to the women of your party, and proposes to favour them with a visit, what are you to do? That is their look-out. And, besides, they can't very well say 'Not at home' if he comes along a canal-bank and finds them in a boat. They will have to be civil to him. Perhaps their youthful minds are impressed by the fame of so great a man ——"

"A great man! I consider him as bad a specimen as I ever saw of the pedantic and conceited schoolmaster! And then he is so hideously ugly!"

"But *don't you* think there is something pathetic in the wor-

ship of beauty when you find that devotion in a rather ill-favoured person? Don't you think that our guest of this evening——"

"He isn't really coming, is he?"

"He said he would try to find us out. And don't you think that, by way of compensation for Nature having given him an unwholesome complexion and green eyes, don't you think he should be allowed a few minutes' worship at the shrine? Suppose that he, too, should find the strands of gold and brown in Miss Peggy's hair rather pretty?"

"Well," says the young man, somewhat gloomily, "it is not for me to say anything, because I am here merely as an invited guest, as he will be if he comes this evening. But I can't help thinking it considerably cheeky of a stranger, or semi-stranger, to thrust himself on a party away on an expedition of this kind."

"To cheer our loneliness, my young friend!"

"He might know we would rather be by ourselves."

"You may be of that opinion; and so may I; but women may be glad of a little gaiety—a little alien admiration even——"

"Gaiety! His ugly mug would turn beer sour!" exclaims this impetuous boy.

Well, it began to clear up in the afternoon, and soon the word was passed round to prepare for an exploration of this neighbourhood in which we had been held captive. And perhaps it was as a make-up for the possible interference of the Scholiast in the evening that Jack Duncombe now assumed sole charge and management of Miss Rosslyn; and our pretty Miss Peggy received these little attentions with much gracious complaisance. Moreover, as these two had discovered a church in the morning, they were allowed to lead the way; and in the warmer light now beginning to stream over from the west, we patiently followed them along the canal-bank, and into a pathway through some fields, until we actually came in sight of a house—a farm-house it was—and near it was a little church, and also a parsonage, and similar evidences that there were people in the world besides ourselves. But we could see no one to tell us the name of the place; nor do we know it *until this day.* A winding and miry lane took us back to the

canal, which, with its wooded banks and rows of poplars, looked quite river-like; and as the walking here was preferable to that of the country roads, we held on our way, with the westering light growing ever more and more golden, and gleaming on the scarcely-stirring, wet foliage all around. And still these two kept on ahead; and, indeed, we were paying but little attention to them—talking as we were on this calm evening of distant friends; until Mrs. Threepenny-bit, happening to glance forward, laughed a little.

"Mr. Duncombe's devotion," she said, "is becoming quite remarkable. One would almost think it was serious. Of course, it can't be serious, because—well, because they don't know each other at all ——"

"Oh! don't they? I assure you they know each other very well indeed," one answers, "if his confidences have been like hers. Oh, yes; it is wonderful how intimate you may become with a young lady if you are interested about herself and her family, and if you have a memory for details. Emily is only fourteen, it is true; but she is tall for her age, and she and Miss Rosslyn are great companions. Emily is at school in Brooklyn. Emily writes to her sister, and her sister writes to her, every Sunday; and the letter is to be posted by the writer's own hand. Emily is so fond of her sister she will hardly let the others go near her when she is at home. Miss Rosslyn's hair got wet to-day, and she tried to dry it in the porch, but couldn't entirely, and it looked very pretty as she was sitting in the pew. Miss Rosslyn is grateful for kindness. Miss Rosslyn likes the people she has met over here. If Miss Rosslyn's opinion of England and the English were known on the other side, America would howl with rage, and rend the stars and stripes, and sit in sackcloth and ashes. Miss Rosslyn is quite frank about her circumstances, and has the merit of dressing inexpensively ——"

"You seem to have heard a good deal about Peggy to-day."

"I had a fair dose."

"Of course the subject wasn't interesting to *you*."

"Madam, all human beings are interesting to me."

"Yes; but you prefer to study those that have pretty eyes, and that will go away with you for long walks along the shore when everybody else on board the yacht is busy packing."

"I don't know to whom you are referring ——"

"I should think not; the list is too long."

"And I don't remember the circumstances; but I can perceive that there may have been an occasion on which considerate people kept themselves out of the way so as to let others get forward with their business."

"And the considerate people, what was their business? English history, I suppose! Well," she adds, with another glance at the couple ahead of us, and with an odd smile on her face, "if Mr. Duncombe is only amusing himself with Peggy, he'd better look out. Of course, it doesn't matter to her whether he is serious or not; she can always have plenty of suitors, if she is so foolish as to think of marrying; but if he fancies that he can make-believe without Peggy seeing through it all, it's little he understands about her. If he doesn't mind, Mr. Duncombe will get *what for*, as your friends in Scotland say."

"You want to know whether he is serious? I'm sure I can't tell you. But I hope we shall hear no more about Emily; for although she is only fourteen, and tall for her age, and writes every Sunday, one doesn't seem to be deeply concerned about her."

"Why, I have got Emily's portrait at home: Peggy gave it to me ever so long ago!" she says, for no earthly reason but to place herself, as regards Peggy, on a footing superior to that of the young man, who only heard of the brat of a school-girl this very morning.

To think we should have been looking on England as rather a sparsely-populated country! Why, we had three visitors that evening! Two of them, whom we found on the bank when we returned to the boat, were of rustic mould, and in stolid silence, and with calm, immovable gaze they contemplated the strange object that had invaded these solitudes. They made no remark; their eyes wandered not; they merely stood there and stared, *and* stared, and stared, as fished the famous fisher of Sunburie. *And perhaps it was* to prevent their being hopelessly mesmerised

that young Duncombe now proceeded to act in a way quite sufficient to arouse anybody's attention—in fact, we ourselves began to wonder whether he had suddenly grown insane. During the latter part of our afternoon stroll he had been looking everywhere about for a big stone; and, having found one, he brought it along to the boat. Now, with a dark resolve visible on his face, he attached a piece of cord to the stone; and then he went into the saloon and came out again with a slim volume in his hand, not a word being uttered the while. The volume we recognised as a little monograph on Coleridge that we had seen lying about; but we knew it by its outside only; consequently we were quite unaware that this piece of criticism, or whatever else it might be, was of a nature to awaken rage. Nevertheless, and with a desperate malignity, Jack Duncombe proceeded to tie the harmless little book to the big stone.

"Fancy," we overheard him say, "fancy setting a rat-minded creature like that to balance, and measure, and estimate the genius of Coleridge! They might as well set a thieves' lawyer to expound the Book of Revelation!"

Forthwith he lifted stone and book together, and heaved; there was a mighty splash, and a series of widening ripples; then slowly the surface of the water became tranquil again. The two rustics stolidly stared at the spot where the stone had sunk. Then they stared at Jack Duncombe. Then they resumed their staring—at the boat, at the windows, at the gunwale, the tiller, the roof, the anchor at the bow. And never a word they spoke. We left them staring.

Our third visitor—to Jack Duncombe's obvious discomfiture—was no other than Mr. Algernon A'Becket, who arrived some little time before dinner, and was in high glee over his success in discovering our whereabouts. Indeed, he was quite hilarious, notwithstanding that his trousers looked rather damp; and as he confessed that after his multifarious adventures of the afternoon he was just a little bit hungry, Murdoch was bidden to make speed, while the women-folk began to light the lamps and candles in order to brighten up the saloon. Jack Duncombe, *of course, would* take no part in the entertainment of this new

guest; but Mr. A'Becket seemed capable of making himself at home without much trouble; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit and her young American friend, as they were laying the cloth, and otherwise getting matters made easy for Murdoch, were very courteous and complaisant towards him, the while he recounted his victorious triumph over all obstacles and difficulties.

"And how are you to get back, Mr. A'Becket?" his hostess said to him, not unnaturally. "I wish we could offer you a berth ——"

"Not at all—not at all!" he answered, with abundant cheerfulness. "I know precisely where I am now ——"

"I'm sure that is more than we do," she observed, rather ruefully.

"And you know I was anxious to see how you looked *en voyage*," he continued, with a well-satisfied glance all round; "and really nothing could be more snug and delightful. How strange it must be to feel yourselves so entirely isolated—a small party all by yourselves, and wandering away into these out-of-the-world places—really, it makes one a little envious."

Jack Duncombe glared: was the man actually begging for an invitation?

And at dinner, too, Mr. A'Becket seemed quite content so long as he could address himself to the two women, Jack Duncombe rarely interfering, except when there was a chance of his posing as Miss Peggy's natural ally and champion. Indeed, the younger man strove to appear in that light whenever occasion offered; and seemed ready to sacrifice the most sacred institutions of his native land for the mere sake of taking her part. For example, our Oxford friend was talking about the irreverence for antiquity commonly attributed to the American people (there was not much of that quality about Peggy, anyway); and said he had once heard an American declare that Squattersville, Nebraska, was of more value to the world than Westminster Abbey; because Squattersville was full of living men, whereas Westminster Abbey was full of dead ones. Whereupon, Miss Peggy said—sensibly and modestly enough, *as we thought*:

"Well, sometimes our people at home say things like that, but they don't believe them. They think it clever to startle you, that is all. If a man were seriously to say anything of that kind in a company of educated Americans, he would be looked on as if he were a baboon escaped from a cage."

That ought to have been enough. But it wasn't enough for Jack Duncombe. Oh, dear, no. Something must be said on behalf of Miss Peggy's countrymen. Miss Peggy herself was not to be crushed by the dread might and majesty of Westminster Abbey.

"After all," said this reckless young man, "if you walk through Westminster Abbey, and impartially look at the names of the people they have put there, you'll come to the conclusion that in former days it was pretty easy to get in. They must have been hard put to it to get a fair show of distinguished men, for the number of nobodies and duffers is perfectly awful. Look at John Philips. Did you ever hear of John Philips?"

Our learned friend from Oxford, being thus directly challenged, had to confess his ignorance of the enshrined John Philips.

"Well, he was a writer of comic verses—at least, I believe they are considered to be comic," the younger man continued, with superfluous scorn. "I know this—I could get you twenty living writers who could do infinitely better verses: indeed, if John Philips were alive now, there is one place where you would *not* find him, and that is at the *Punch* weekly dinner."

Mr. A'Becket turned to Miss Peggy, and said to her, with a smile:

"Your countryman whom I heard make that remark is said to be worth thirty million dollars".

"He isn't worth consideration," she answered, with a kind of audacious petulance; and there the subject dropped.

Now, nothing but the most despicable jealousy could have refused to admit that our visitor did his very best to make himself amiable and amusing. It is true that he was a little too much given to the formulating of opinions on matters small and great; and that is a weariness to the flesh; but on these opinions he did not insist over much. It was almost pathetic,

indeed, to see this person, of cadaverous complexion, and somewhat too obvious front teeth, striving so hard to win, by the display of his intellectual fascinations, a smile from the eyes of Beauty. He succeeded, too. Miss Peggy was very good to him—doubtless merely because he was our guest, and she was bound to be civil. If he had encountered unheard-of perils in his wild pursuit of us, surely now he was reaping his reward. And yet there was a skilful touch of respect in her manner towards him. She seemed impressed by his authority; even when she was most amused, there was a sort of pleased submission in her look. Of course, before this stranger she was decorum itself. She played the properly-conducted young lady to perfection. One began to fear that she was doing it only too well; and that in the ingenuous mind of Jack Duncombe there might be planted the first baleful seeds of suspicion.

But you should have heard how that young man broke forth when our guest—somewhat reluctantly, as it seemed—had to leave us to find his way across country to some railway station that he named. You would have thought that this harmless freak on the part of an Oxford don, instead of being in its way a kind of compliment, was really a gross invasion of one's inalienable natural rights. If we wished to be by ourselves, why should we not be allowed to be by ourselves? Mr. Jack Duncombe made much use of that word "ourselves". He seemed to like it somehow. Throughout his remonstrances there appeared to run the assumption that we four had cut ourselves off from the world, and were to spend a nomadic existence together for the rest of our lives. And then the infuriate scorn which he dealt out to pedants and their insufferable airs!

"I propose," said he, in his reckless fashion, "that we should give up our leisure time on this trip to the composition of a great and learned work—just to show what we can do. Will you join, Miss Rosslyn?"

"Oh, yes," says the young lady, with calm effrontery. "What is it to be about?"

"Oh, anything will serve to show off with. We must make *it imposing. The* square of the hypothenuse, if you like."

"That would be very interesting," she observes, with much complacency. "Of course you will begin with a description of the square—I mean the square in which the Hypothenuse lives?"

"Certainly," he answers, "catching on" with alacrity. "Then we come to the habits of the Hypothenuse—his time of getting up and going into the city."

"I would have something more romantic than that," Miss Peggy says, thoughtfully. "If he lives in a square, there must be people opposite. One of them might be a young lady ——"

"Yes, undoubtedly; but she is rather an unknown quantity yet—we will call her x until we can settle more about her. She is living with her Uncle Rhomboid ——"

"And the Hypothenuse has the greatest difficulty in meeting with her," she continues.

"The gardens in the square would be a good place: I suppose the Hypothenuse would have a key?"

"Naturally. But then again Aunt Parallelogram distinctly approves of the match; and is going to leave all her money to x. Would you make the Hypothenuse rich or poor?"

So these two young idiots went on; one of them apparently taking a grim delight in thus revenging himself (as he considered) for the intrusion of a stranger among "ourselves". There was no other thought for the hapless Scholiast making his way along darkened roads to wait for the last train in some solitary little railway-station. Here the lights were burning clear; and there were cigars and things; and these light-hearted young folk knew they were now safe from all interference: with aimless merriment, and bandied words, and laughing glances to fill full every glad and precious minute. Moreover, to-morrow we should resume our voyage, and be off into the unknown. It was all very well for this prying collegian to ferret us out when we were within measurable distance of Oxford town; but soon we should be away in remoter wilds, with all communications cut, except such as we chose should remain open. And where would the long-coated metaphysician be then? Jack Duncombe and his bright-eyed neighbour eagerly followed up this subject of the Hypothenuse; and turned it outside, and inside, and

topsy-turvy; until they had got a quite blood-curdling series of adventures to relate; and all the while Miss Peggy's smiling looks and dimpled cheek seemed to show that she was enjoying this careless gaiety, after the constraint and propriety conduct of the previous part of the evening; and the young man who was her aider and abettor in the rambling nonsense made no secret of his satisfaction that we were once more entirely "by ourselves".

CHAPTER X.

"Within the sand of what far river lies
The gold that gleams in tresses of my Love?
What highest circle of the heavens above
Is jewelled with such stars as are her eyes?
And where is the rich sea whose coral vies
With her red lips, that cannot kiss enough?
What dawn-lit garden knew the rose, whereof
The fled soul lives in her cheek's rosy guise?"

"WELL, I declare!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in accents of only half-smothered indignation, as she comes into the saloon at an early hour. "In all my life I never knew such weather! The tourists talk about the rain in the West Highlands! The West Highlands don't know how to rain; they should come here and take a lesson. And just as we are about to get to such interesting places! Captain Columbus told me yesterday that we should almost certainly get to Warwick to-morrow night. But I suppose the whole district that used to be the Forest of Arden will be flooded—I wonder how Rosalind, and Celia, and Touchstone would have liked *that*. And I hoped we should be able to see the Ruins of Kenilworth by moonlight. Moonlight, indeed! We needn't expect to find the ghost of poor Amy Robsart wandering about in weather like this."

Here Murdoch enters.

"Murdoch, don't you wish you were back in the Highlands to get a glimpse of the sun again?"

Murdoch looks puzzled.

"Yes, Mem; I think there's another shower coming over."

"Another shower coming over! It is raining as hard as ever it knows how."

"Oh, yes; it iss a pad country, this, for rain—a verry pad

country for rain, Mem. I wass thinking I neffer pefore sah so mich land under watter."

Here Miss Rosslyn enters.

"Peggy, if I write a history of this trip, I will call it 'A Voyage in Waterproofs'."

"Well," says Miss Peggy, with her wonted cheerfulness, "what better could we do than devote such a day to literature? I'm going to write a novel ——"

"With the Hypothenuse for hero?" Jack Duncombe suggests.

"Oh, no; something very serious indeed. You'll see. Just wait until Murdoch has cleared the table after breakfast; and then I will make a beginning that will show you something."

However, when Murdoch had cleared the table, it appeared that it was required for another purpose; Mrs. Threepenny-bit wanted to do up her flowers for the day—including the roses presented by Mr. A'Becket; and soon she had the cloth removed, and was busily at work. Peggy went and got her banjo. First she played, in a careless way, some plantation dance or other of which we did not know the name. Then, in almost an undertone, she sang—

Mary had a little lamp
Filled full of kerosene;
She went with it to light the fire
And has not since benzine.

Suddenly, at the conclusion of these touching words, there was a simultaneous roar of a chorus—

Then carry me back to Tennessee,
There let me live and die.

She sang "How doth the little busy bee"; she sang "Ye banks and braes"; she sang "Sylvia hath a beaming eye," or any other thing that could be suggested to her; and ever the recurrent and stormy chorus was volunteered her at the end of each verse. Jack Duncombe caught up the air at once, and joined in with a will. It was his initiation into the art and practice of madness as an antidote against despair and rage and *rain. Nay, he himself* made random shots at verses to suit;

and was anxious to relieve Miss Rosslyn from the duty of singing the solo. But at last she laid aside the banjo.

"Really, this is mere frivolity," she said, with a preoccupied air. "I must set about my novel, even if I can't have the table."

She went to the ladies' cabin and returned with a tiny writing-desk, which she proceeded to balance on her knee as she sat sideways on her seat. Then we could perceive that she was engaged in the agony of composition. Biting the end of her pencil seemed to help her a little. Her brows were knitted; her face was grave; and yet one could half fancy that there was mischief in her downcast eyes.

"Come, Miss Peggy," one says to her, "let's hear what start you have made."

"Oh, don't interrupt; you have no idea how horribly difficult it is. I want something bold and thrilling for a beginning—something that will arrest the attention of the critics."

"If you write for the critics you won't come to much good," says Jack Duncombe, who rarely fails to have his fling when the chance is given him. "I have been thinking of addressing a letter to M. Pasteur, asking him if he couldn't inoculate one against the effects of criticism. He might render you safe from the bites of the rabid beasts."

"How *am* I to get on, if you interrupt?" complains Miss Peggy; but there is not much anger in her petulance.

"Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "do you always put out the tip of your tongue while you are writing?"

"Only when I am writing a novel," she answers, placidly.

"Is it at your readers, or at your critics, or at your companions?"

Miss Peggy does not look up.

"That's telling. I put out my tongue."

"Oh, I suppose you think we are in one of the streets of Verona!" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with some vague recollection of a Montague and Capulet quarrel.

Here, however, Miss Peggy not only raises her eyes, she also puts aside her writing-desk, and gets up. She edges towards the door and opens it. Her glance is fixed upon her

hostess; and it is full of malice; perhaps she is annoyed by these unseemly interruptions.

"Oh, no," she says, retreating still further, "we're not in Verona at all. Verona house-boat in the middle of England."

In a twinkling she disappears; and the same instant a sponge surcharged with water strikes the edge of the door, just where her saucy face had been. It was a very good aim for a woman: had Mrs. Threepenny-bit been the thirtieth part of a second quicker, that impertinent hussy would have met with the punishment she richly deserved. Then we made bold to take up the sheet of paper on which Miss Peggy had pencilled the opening lines of her novel. Thus they ran:—"*It was a cold day in New York—a cold, cold winter's day. In the chill easterly blast the brown-stone buildings had turned to a livid purple; and the veins in the marble blocks ran blue. Not a single statue in Central Park had a nose or a toe left; all had dropped off, frost-bitten by the terrible wind.*"

"Ah, there is no sentiment among the young people of these days," says Queen Tita, as she sprinkles the roses with her wet fingers. "When I was at school, the girls used often to try to write stories; but they were always full of noble people and beautiful aspirations. Now-a-days, there is nothing but burlesque. That wretch has been simply making a fool of us."

At this moment Miss Peggy reappears.

"Come along—come along, everybody," she says, briskly. "The morning is clearing up beautifully; I believe it is going to be quite fine. And Captain Columbus is here; and he has brought a whole multitude of people with him—two men and a boy at the very least; and they have a barrow; and he wants to know if he can come into the saloon to lift the flooring. There is quite a commotion outside."

This was stirring news indeed, after the silence and inactivity of these last four-and-twenty hours; and forthwith we swarmed out, to greet the reappearance of our crew. We found Columbus in the midst of this vast concourse; and a *busy and important* man was he; for he had already purchased

three hundredweight of old iron, and was now bargaining for a fourth. It turned out that there was another bridge, not far ahead, that was likely to trouble us; and our gallant skipper, with a foresight and a resolution reminding us of the qualities that enabled his great namesake to discover a new world, had determined to reduce the height of the boat by cramming in a lot more of ballast. Strange ballast it was, when we came to examine it. Apparently, it was refuse from some railway factory; there were all kinds of bolts, and screws, and rivets, and nuts, and bits of rail; and, as Columbus proceeded to tear up the flooring of the saloon, and to wedge in this old iron alongside the other ballast, one began to wonder what would happen supposing that the Nameless Barge were to be sunk somewhere—in the Severn, for example—and lie imbedded there for "an eternity or two". What would the new race of mortals, with their aerial navigation, make of these strange fragments? Would they recognise them as belonging to the half-mythic railway age? And perhaps a few ribs and planks of our noble vessel might remain, to offer materials for all kinds of conjecture? Well; they might be able to reconstruct the Nameless Barge, perhaps; but they were not likely to figure out in their imagination that it ever contained a creature so perverse, and wilful, and bewildering, and demure, and generally dangerous and demoniacal as our Peggy. She was talking to Captain Columbus now with an air of innocent curiosity on her face that would have deceived her own mother. And Captain Columbus—who had that morning bought for himself in Oxford a straw hat, and a brilliant blue necktie, and made himself very smart indeed—was excessively proud and pleased that the young lady should be so interested in his work, and became quite communicative about boats, and bridges, and tunnels, and what not. Miss Peggy listened with a grave attention. It is always a pleasing sight to see a young mind engaged in the acquisition of knowledge.

Glad enough were we to find ourselves once more in motion; and as we stole quietly on through this unknown region, the skies were banking themselves up into April-looking masses of

silver grey and purple grey, while bursts of vivid sunlight chased each other across the richly-wooded landscape. But our literary projects were not altogether abandoned. We returned to the subject of Miss Peggy's novel. She confessed that there was a touch of exaggeration in her description of a cold day in New York; but she wanted the opening to be effective.

"But your characters, Miss Peggy, what about them? Is it to be a tragedy or a comedy?"

"Oh! I don't know," she says, artlessly. "I don't know that there will be much of a story. You know they say that all the stories have been told."

"They say? Who say? Don't you believe any such rubbish. As long as there are two men and a woman in the world—or two women and a man, for that matter—the elemental passions will be there—love, jealousy, hatred, rage, despair, and all the rest of them—and there will be plenty of romantic story to tell, tragic or idyllic as the case may be, if there is anybody capable of telling it. Don't you follow the lead of any literary knife-grinder ——"

"But I say," interposes our young Dramatist, "that is rather an awful picture, isn't it? I don't mean the two men and one woman left in the world; that would soon right itself; one of the men would soon be a dead un. But fancy the two women and the one man—just think what his situation would be ——"

"Yes," says Queen Tita, "what would you do, supposing you were the man?"

"I?" he answers, and then for a second he pauses, as if the horror of the possibility were too bewildering. "Well, I think this is what I would do. I would go to them and say, 'My dear friends, a very extraordinary thing has happened. If you'll only climb up to the top of these Downs, you will find that the English Channel has gone dry—the water is all away; and if you like you can walk across dryshod and then go on to Paris, and see if there are any bonnets and parasols left in the shop-windows.' Very likely they wouldn't believe me; but at all events they would be sure to go up to have a look; and then, *as soon as I had* seen them started, do you know where I

should be?—I should be on the main road to the north, running as hard as my legs could carry me; and I shouldn't think myself safe until I had got up to the Moor of Rannoch or somewhere behind Ben Nevis."

"'O ye'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road,'" murmurs Queen Tita as a kind of aside, "'And I'll be in Scotland before ye'——"

"Madam," one says to her, "you'd better go no further with that Loch Lomond song. The refrain is genuine; the rest of it has 'spurious' written on every line."

"The melody is pretty," she pleads in excuse.

"Undoubtedly. It is simply 'The Bonnie House o' Airlie'."

"At all events the words are not quite so preposterous as those of 'Allan Percy,'" she says. "I think that is about the worst imitation of a Scotch ballad that I ever met with—and it is of American make, Peggy ——"

But Peggy is looking rather stupified.

"'Allan Percy,'" she says. "Isn't it Scotch? I always thought it was a real Scotch ballad—and very pretty, too ——"

"Oh, Peggy!" her friend cries, in accents of deep distress, "don't talk like that. You quite alarm me. If you don't instinctively feel that the words of that wretched thing are as foreign to the whole spirit of Scotch song-writing as they can be—and that the music is just as foreign, too, to the whole spirit of Scotch music—then I am simply frightened to think of the trouble I shall have in teaching you. And of course it's got to be done. But fancy the time! And how am I to begin? Well, perhaps you'd best start with Aytoun's 'Ballads of Scotland'——"

"I know another way," says Miss Peggy.

"And what is that?"

"Take me to Scotland with you," says the young lady, without more ado.

Queen Tita's soft brown eyes smile a quick approval.

"Do you know, Peggy, that is the prettiest speech you have made since you came on board this boat, and the most sensible too? And I shall consider it a promise."

Very spring-like indeed was this fresh-blowing morning, with its skies of purple and silver, its sudden bursts of sunlight, and its curiously vivid greens of the rain-washed and rustling foliage. And as the floral decoration of the saloon was now finished, and as Miss Peggy seemed disinclined to resume her literary labours, we had the boat stopped for a second or two, and all of us went ashore for a stroll along the bank, the two women setting out by themselves arm-in-arm. This was a strangely voiceless country through which we were going. There was hardly a sound anywhere; the only living things visible were some Highland cattle, that looked picturesque enough in the lush meadows, though a background of grey rock, green bracken, and crimson heather might have been more appropriate. Nevertheless, we knew that there must be some population somewhere in this lonely region; for at one and the same time we could make out the spires of three churches peeping up above the trees: and our gallant captain informed us that these three churches were built by three brothers, who chose the sites so that if anyone of them wanted the loan of a hammer it could be thrown to him. It was in this neighbourhood that we came to the bridge about which we had been warned; and well was it that our faithful Columbus had had the forethought to put in the additional four hundredweight of ballast. Even as it was we had enormous difficulty in getting through; and we began to wonder what the Nameless Barge would be like at the end of our voyage, if she had to encounter much more of this scraping and bumping. But we did get her through—that was the main point; and thereafter left her to her sober gliding through this still landscape, while we continued our careless stroll and talk. Oddly enough, it was Miss Peggy who formed the chief subject of Mr. Jack Duncombe's conversation on this soft-aired morning; and it was curious to find from how many points of view that young lady seemed to prove interesting to him. He was looking at her as she walked on ahead with her friend; and he remarked, with something of a critical air:

"*I wish Miss* Rosslyn was an actress".

"Indeed; and why?"

"I wish she was an actress; and that I could write a piece for her, in which she should play the heroine. Fancy what a chance that would be for me! That always seems to me the great pull a playwright has over a novelist: whatever the playwright's heroine may be like, at least the public see that she is alive. All that he has to do is to invent situations for her, and give her words to speak. She is alive; and the public see for themselves what she is. In a novel it is only a description of the person that is there; and it must be horribly difficult to get that life-like."

"Not at all; anybody can do it."

"Why, this very morning I was trying to think what I should do if I wanted to describe Miss Rosslyn in a book; and I couldn't in the least see how it was to be done. Even her appearance," he continues, looking once more in that critical fashion at the young lady ahead of us—"even her appearance would come down to a mere catalogue that wouldn't tell you much, would it? You see if she came on the stage, then everyone would recognise the symmetry of her figure, and—and—the kind of graceful way she moves—and the animation—the intelligence—of her face. But in a book, what are you to do?"

"What, indeed!"

"I was trying, just for fun, you know ——"

"To describe Miss Peggy?"

"No, not exactly; but I was wondering, if I should attempt to write a story, how I should begin to describe the heroine."

"And, naturally, you took Miss Peggy for your heroine. Very well; did you succeed?"

"Of course I did not put anything down in writing; I was merely looking at her from time to time, and thinking," says the young man, with much modesty. "Well, you know, there are certain things you could definitely name. You might say she had beautiful hair."

"You might—especially when it gets blown about by wind and rain on her way to church."

"Golden-brown, I should call it; and a little wavy here and there; that is something you could definitely say. Then her forehead—you might call her forehead intelligent?" he suggests, with a trifle of timidity.

"You might—but it wouldn't convey very much."

"That's just where it is! That's just the difficulty. Of course you have noticed what a beautifully-shaped nostril she has?"

"In a general way, perhaps."

"But that would sound absurd in a book! Of course you might do what the poets do—bring in all kinds of things as similes—you might give her cherry lips, and rose-petal cheeks, and speedwell-blue eyes, and all the rest of it; but that wouldn't be Miss Rosslyn."

"No?"

"It's all very well to say that her cheek is like the petal of a rose; but that tells you nothing about the curious little dimple that appears there when she has been saying something very audacious to your wife, in a perfectly grave voice, and with her eyes cast down. No," he adds, almost with a touch of vexation, "I don't believe the minutest catalogue that could be made of her features would be of any use at all—no matter how true it might be. There's a—a something—about her expression that makes Miss Rosslyn Miss Rosslyn, and unlike any other girl I ever saw. Perhaps it is her eyes?" he says suddenly.

"It may be her eyes."

"There is a sort of submission in them when she looks at you—as if—well, as though they might very readily laugh at you, only that her natural courtesy keeps them serious. It is a very curious look."

"Yes?"

"And then there is a kind of harmony of expression in her face—I mean—well, when she laughs ever so little, her eyes and her lips and the dimple in her cheeks seem to brighten up all together—I don't quite know how to describe it—but I'm sure you couldn't put it into a book. Perhaps it is that there is *so much life in her face*; and you can't describe life, you know;

it is an intangible, invisible, unknown thing; and yet there is plenty of it in Miss Rosslyn's face."

"Really."

"If you were putting her into a book, now, how would you describe her?" this remarkably cool person proceeds.

"Oh, I wouldn't try. As you say, it might be too difficult. Besides, she might not interest me as she interests you."

"You don't think her interesting?" he says, surprised into some brief expression of disappointment.

"In a way, perhaps. She seems a nice kind of creature—if she wouldn't make puns."

"Well, now," he says, warmly, "I am delighted to hear her make puns, for it shows she is not standing on ceremony with her companions for the time being. And really I cannot understand the fuss people make in pretending to be shocked by any little joke of that kind. I call it simply a very bad form of affectation. Why, what takes them to a burlesque?—yet you'll hear a whole audience cry, 'Oh! oh!'—and they are delighted and laughing all the same, especially if the pun is an atrocious one. I am very glad to find Miss Rosslyn so frank."

"Well, that settles it. I won't remonstrate with her any more."

"I like to hear you talk like that!" he has the insolence to say. "You know quite well that when she does or says anything outrageous it is done simply to please you. She looks to you for approval every time; I have seen her again and again; she is always watching you at dinner, if she has anything malicious to say. Your wife declares that if you did not encourage her in mischief she would be as well-behaved a girl as any in the country. Not that I have ever seen anything really to object to; of course not; I like fun as well as anybody; and I certainly like to find a girl like that enjoying plenty of freedom. She has an abundance of high spirits, hasn't she? Oh, but I say," this young man continues, suddenly changing his tone, "didn't she make an awful fool of that prig, A'Becket? Did you ever see anything like it? Wasn't it delightful? Why, she made him believe he was the cleverest fellow she had

ever beheld. She flattered him just off his head. And it was done so nicely and neatly—and so seriously: of course he didn't suspect a little bit. Anyone else, though, could see what was going on. Oh, I assure you it was beautiful to look at!"

"Then you consider Miss Peggy an arrant hypocrite—is that your conclusion?"

"A hypocrite?—certainly not. It was merely her kindness. If a man is such an ass as to like being flattered—well, he gets what he wants. Don't you think he was pleased? He grinned with his long front teeth until I thought he was going to tumble into his own mouth. I consider it was the height of good-nature for Miss Rosslyn to take so much trouble in making herself agreeable to a fellow like that."

"But she did take the trouble?"

"Oh, yes," he admits, rather grudgingly. "She did. I suppose his airs and affectations amused her. And then, as I say, she is very good-natured; and he was your guest; of course she made herself agreeable to him—in an ordinary kind of way."

"And have you decided, then, on putting her into a book?"

He hesitates for a moment.

"No; I'm afraid she would puzzle me a little too much. But just fancy if I had a comedy, and she was to play the heroine. Why, her mere appearance on the stage would be half the battle; the first flash of her eyes, and the public would be in a pleasant and favourable mood. In private life, too," he continues, "I should say her face was a very efficient passport. She seems to find not much difficulty in making friends."

"But you haven't yet quite decided what is the particular fascination she exercises, have you?"

"I decide it?—not I! But what I am pretty sure of is this—that you wouldn't get at it by giving a catalogue of her features. No; it's some quality—perhaps some mental quality—perhaps some quality of disposition—that seems to make her attractive. She's very companionable, for one thing. She's not stiff. Her laugh is quite delightfully frank. There's no humbug about her. I should say that her mind was *of a particularly* healthy tone; she seems to have the natural

carelessness of a child—although your wife sometimes teases her by attributing all kinds of evil designs to her. Of course that's merely nonsense. You can see what excellent friends they are really. And she seems to be very affectionate ——"

"Who?"

"Miss Rosslyn."

"Miss Rosslyn again! My young friend, if you go on in this way, it isn't merely a description of Miss Rosslyn you'll have constructed, but a whole library of volumes about her. Suppose, for a couple of seconds, we talk about something else!"

"Ah!" he says, "it's all very well. You pretend not to be interested. You come and ask me what is the secret of her fascination ——"

"Did I really?"

"At all events you affect an indifference that you don't show when Miss Rosslyn and you are together," he says, with some touch of resentment. "One would almost think there was some secret understanding between you two—I mean that a third person hasn't a fair chance. I believe that she bamboozled that Oxford fellow simply and solely for your amusement."

"That is a very shocking thing to say of a young lady. However, as you have now got a perfectly clear conception of Miss Rosslyn's character, viewed from every possible standpoint, why shouldn't you put that into a book? It seems a pity that the result of so much study should be thrown away in idle talking."

"I'll wait," he answers, somewhat moodily—and who can tell what dark suspicions appear to have suddenly leapt into his head? "Since she made such a fool of that fellow A'Becket, perhaps she may be trying to make a fool of me; who knows?"

"And that is the end of all your praise of her!"

"Oh, no; I don't take back anything I have said," he answers, irresolutely. "But she is a clever-headed young woman; and—and she may be having her fun. That is only natural, at her age. Who could object?"

"I don't think you, at least, should object to the way in

which she has treated you. Most young men would even be a little grateful."

"Oh, well," he says, with a careless air, "if it amuses her, of course I am very glad."

At this moment the two womenfolk ahead paused for a few seconds, to allow us to overtake them; and as we drew near to them, and as our young Dramatist found that Miss Peggy's remarkably clear and expressive eyes were regarding him—and regarding him with a most amiable look—it is hardly to be wondered at that his face brightened up a little.

"Mr. Duncombe," she said (and you should have seen how instantly attentive he was, and respectful, and anxious to please), "Captain Columbus tells me we shall be at Banbury before long. That is some kind of a town, I suppose. And do you think it likely you could get me some blank music sheets?"

"Oh, yes, certainly!" was the immediate rejoinder.

"You know I am going to keep you to your promise of writing out for me 'The Green Bushes,'" said Miss Peggy, most pleasantly and cheerfully, "and I must do something by way of exchange. You rather liked the 'Daisy Clog-Dance'—shall I note that down for you?"

"Will you?" he said, quickly.

"Oh, yes, or any of them you happen to like," she said, in the most good-natured way. "Several I picked up merely by hearing them—and I doubt whether you could get them in England. Now, if we have the blank music with us, I could jot down any of them for you, at any odd moment."

"Well, that is awfully kind of you!" said he, with the most submissive gratitude. "And—and let me see—what was the name of that very pretty one you played this morning? ——"

This subject having been started, these two naturally walked on together. And where were all his wild suspicions now? Where was his "stand-off" attitude? Of course he was telling her how charmingly she played these tripping compositions; and of course she was saying how the song of "The Green Bushes" would remind her of this excursion when she

was far away in America; and of course he was telling her that, when he was helping to plan out the expedition, he had no idea it would prove so enjoyable, though everyone could see how much of that was owing to herself, and her happy fashion of making the best of everything. Poor wretch! His suspicious mood was by far the safer for him; but young people will go their own way.

And at length we came to a town! It was the town of Banbury. We contemplated with a strange curiosity this mighty congeries of houses and buildings and roofs and chimneys; and felt quite shy on encountering the gaze of the myriads of people who were hanging about the canal-basin. That was but a first and fleeting impression, however. When the horse had been led away to a stable, and when Murdoch had been entrusted with sundry commissions, we were free to explore this centre of civilisation for ourselves; and found it rather a featureless and empty little place, bearing a general kind of resemblance to Chipping Norton. Our own purchases did not extend beyond the blank sheets of music; though we stared at the shop-windows with that aimless wish to buy something which generally gets into the head of boating-folk when they go ashore. No; Banbury did not interest us much. But before we had got away from the place, we had formed the conclusion that the familiar Oxfordshire rhyme—

Banbury Church
That hasn't got a steeple:
A very dirty town,
And a very proud people—

is grossly malicious, libellous, and untrue. So far from being proud, the people of Banbury simply overpowered us with their polite attentions. The fact was that we had here to face the two most wretchedly small and unmanageable bridges that we found on the whole of our route; and the population of Banbury, no doubt, ashamed of these obstructions, and sympathising with us in our anxious distress, were of one mind that we should not be stopped if their united exertions could assist us through. They got ropes and hauled. They got poles and

pushed. They swarmed into the stern-sheets, in humility and kindness acting as additional ballast. They clustered on to the bow, to give us the benefit there also of their weight. Finally a lot of them got on the top, and lay on their backs, and shoved against the low arch with their feet. Amid all this wild struggling, a slight grating noise was heard; undoubtedly the boat was beginning to move; their efforts were redoubled; at length we shot triumphantly through; and our multitude of friends could now go ashore again and regard with satisfaction the victory they had achieved. And yet they say that the inhabitants of Banbury are a proud people!

These obstructions had delayed us very considerably, however; and that evening we did not get much beyond Cropredy, the red brick houses and barns of which hamlet looked pleasantly warm in colour after the cold hues of green through which we had been sailing on this smurry afternoon. For the rain was on again.

"Really, I never saw anything like it!" Queen Tita said, impatiently. "I shouldn't wonder if Murdoch went back to the North and told his friends that he had been paying a visit to the lower regions. Do you know what they are called in Gaelic, Peggy?—*I-fruin*, the Island of Rain.* Poor Murdoch! Fancy what kind of a story he will have to tell about this country when he goes back to Tobermory."

"I like these wet afternoons very well," said Miss Peggy, with much content. "They are an excuse for lighting the candles so much the sooner."

"Oh, I think they are jolly!" young Shakespeare asserted, with superfluous energy of conviction. "They are so snug. You shut everything out. You are a little world all to yourselves. When you know that it is raining and miserable outside, it makes it just so much the pleasanter."

This was all very well for a couple of young people who could amuse themselves by playing Ferdinand and Miranda when they chose; but we had come to see what England was

* She might have added that the Gaelic for smurry weather is *fliuch*, which sounds ominously like the German *fluch*.

like in these out-of-the-way districts, and were less satisfied with being shut up in this pine-wood box. No doubt the little saloon looked comfortable enough when the lights were lit; and the velvet cushions and drawn red blinds were of a cheerful aspect; moreover, we had Miss Peggy, with her banjo, and her bright eyes, and her malice, and her mocking will-o'-the-wisp elusiveness of mood, and her sudden appeals for a frank "making-up" that you couldn't trust too far. Oh, yes, these were pleasant evenings; but they might have been in London. Of course, in London we should not have had the eerie feeling, recurring from time to time, whatever kind of mischief or merriment was going on, that outside were still solitudes, and grey mists, and the solemn gathering down of a voiceless night. For no matter what village or hamlet might be within hail, we invariably chose a lonely, and, if possible, an inaccessible, spot for our moorings. On this particular evening, when Miss Peggy was proceeding to shut out the doleful landscape by drawing together the blinds, she suddenly paused. Then she silently beckoned us to look. Just outside, in the ghostly grey meadow there was a solitary sheep that had come nibbling and nibbling its way down to the edge of the bank, and with such strict attention to business that it had not noticed the strange object in front of it. Moreover, the meadow was raised somewhat above the level of the water, so that the animal's head, bent to the ground, was precisely on a level with Miss Peggy's head and only a foot or two off. Nearer and nearer it came.

"Tap on the window," we said to her, for we didn't want the poor creature to be frightened out of its wits.

But the same instant it had become aware that there was something in front of it; it raised a pair of startled and wide-apart eyes only to find that a pair of human eyes were quite close to it, and gazing at it; and then, with a bound into the air—as if it had been shot—it sprang backwards.

"Really," said Miss Peggy, as she drew the folds of the blind together, "I had no idea I looked so ferocious."

Now, that evening was a memorable one, for it proved to have far-*reaching* consequences. During the day there had

been a good deal of idle talking about literary projects, with even some vague suggestion that Miss Peggy might figure in a play or be described in a book; but after dinner on this evening, while as yet there was some wine on the table, and cigars were being produced, and while Miss Peggy's white fingers just touched the strings of her banjo from time to time, with hardly an audible sound, our young Dramatist, secure of the sympathy of this small circle, and perhaps not unwilling to give himself some importance in the eyes of the two women-folk, unfolded to us the outlines of a far more ambitious undertaking.

"Well, you see, it is only the subject I have considered as yet," said he—and Miss Peggy was so considerate as to stop her tinkling, and listen with serious eyes; "but that seems to me to be striking enough. I don't even know whether it would be better treated in a play or in a book. Perhaps the story couldn't be fully told in a play—I'm afraid the 'unities' would have to suffer; but I will show you what the position is, and perhaps you will be able to help me with some hints. Wouldn't it be fine if I were to write a play, and Miss Rosslyn a novel, as an outcome of our meditations during this voyage? We should all have a hand in them—a kind of joint partnership ——"

"Please, I want all my profits for myself," says Miss Peggy; "I have to buy innumerable things for my sister Emily before I go back home."

"But the story, Mr. Duncombe?" says Queen Tita, as Murdoch brings in the coffee.

"Well, look what a fine combination this is, whether for a story or a play," Shakespeare junior begins, with a certain air of complacency. "You have first a young Italian poet, of noble birth and large fortune, ardent, impetuous, and proud; of striking presence, too—tall and pale, with long flowing red hair; a splendid horseman—indeed you can hardly tell whether he isn't as proud of his horses as of his tragedies that have already given a new life to the dramatic literature of his *ountry.* A more striking figure you can hardly imagine; a

man given over to all kinds of passionate impulses and enthusiasms; hurrying from one capital of Europe to another in feverish impatience, generally in a state of delirious joy or acutest anguish over some love affair, and then seeking for distraction in violent fits of study. Very well; in the midst of this wild whirl of life, he is introduced, in Florence, to a young and beautiful Princess, of great accomplishments, fond of letters and the arts, and of the most amiable character. I'm afraid it wouldn't be easy to get a stage-heroine to look the part, for the peculiarity of her beauty is that she has singularly black eyes with a dazzlingly fair complexion and light hair. His own description of her is 'un dolce focoso negli occhi nerissimi accoppiatosi con candidissima pelle e biondi capelli'. Now this is the situation—that this beautiful and amiable young Princess has been taken from a convent when she was nineteen years of age and married to a man she never saw before—a drunken, brutal old reprobate, who ill-treats her cruelly, and makes her life a constant misery to her; and this is the condition of affairs when she meets this passionate and wayward being of a poet who, almost at first sight, conceives for her an exalted and ideal affection very different from his previous amours. They tell a story," continues our young playwright, satisfied to find the two women listening so attentively, "about that first meeting that perhaps might serve as an incident, when one came to arrange the materials. It was in a picture gallery in Florence. The Princess happened to be looking at a portrait of Charles XII., and said that she greatly admired the costume. What must her new acquaintance do but go immediately and get for himself a precisely similar costume, in which he made his appearance in the streets of Florence, not heeding the sarcasm of his friends, though he seems to have been extremely sensitive to ridicule. That is a mere incident, by-the-way, of course. Well, on her side, the young Princess is at once interested in this vehement, tall, red-haired young Count—as she proved afterwards, she was much more than interested; but her husband is as jealous as he is brutal and ill-tempered, and the two friends only meet

under the full observation of Florentine society. But, of course, the first thing that presents itself to his mind is the necessity of freeing her from the cruel tyranny that is killing her existence; and here there comes on the scene an Irishman —a gay, adventurous Irishman, who has a nimble-witted wife; and soon they and the impetuous lover have a plot schemed out amongst them to spirit away the young Princess, and get her safely into a convent, so that she may appeal for protection to the Pope ——"

"But, Mr. Duncombe," Queen Tita says, with rather a puzzled look, "is this a real story you are telling us—or one you have invented?"

"Oh, it is a real story, so far as the facts go," he answered. "Only I thought I wouldn't mention names, so as to leave your minds free from any prejudice or prepossession."

"If you did tell us the real names, shouldn't we understand all the better?" she said.

"At least, the name of your hero—the tall, red-haired poet," pleaded Miss Peggy.

"Why, Vittorio Alfieri!" he said, rather with an air of triumph.

"And the beautiful Princess?"

"The beautiful Princess—she was a bit of a poet, too, and an artist—many a portrait she painted of Alfieri—well, she was Louisa, Princess of Stolberg, and Countess of Albany."

"The Countess of Albany?" Queen Tita repeated; and she looked at him still with that bewildered air. "The Countess of Albany? Then her husband—the man you described ——"

"Yes," he said, with a careless laugh; "the besotted old drunkard who used to beat his wife was no other than your 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'."

He knew not what he had done. In this trumpery search after materials for some trivial book or play, he had taken no thought that he might be outraging all kinds of personal sentiments and fondly-cherished associations. Of course, Queen Tita uttered no word. He might describe in

what terms he pleased the last of the ill-fated Stuarts—the hapless wretch whom a hundred bitter disappointments dragged down to a miserable doom: she would make no protest. But one of us sitting there, and observing her proud silence, knew this right well: that if the young man who was so jauntily setting out on his play-writing career had succumbed in any way to the glamour of Miss Peggy's eyes, and to the provoking fascination of her wiles and witchcraft—if he had been filling the future with plans and schemes far other than those pertaining to the stage—and if he had been counting on Queen Tita's intercession on his behalf, and perhaps even thinking that she would plead his cause for him, and befriend him, and help him to win that precious prize, then, through this unlucky disclosure of these literary designs of his, he had "wrought for" himself "an irredeemable woe".

CHAPTER XI.

"Quoth I, 'My bird—my bonnie, bonnie bird—
Is that a tale ye borrow?
Or is't some words ye've learnt by rote,
Or a lilt o' dool and sorrow?'

"'Oh! no, no, no,' the wee bird sang,
'I've flown since mornin' early;
But sic a day o' wind and rain—
Oh! wae's me for Prince Charlie!'"

On this still morning, while as yet the unknown world around us seems but half awake, there is a tall young lady, of slim and elegant figure, standing quite alone in the stern of the boat. It is the Person without a Character. She has perched herself on the steersman's plank; her arms are placed on the transverse iron rod; her chin rests contemplatively on her crossed palms. And who can tell what dreams and reveries may not be in the calm deeps of her eyes, which can be thoughtful and wistful enough when they are not full of malice, and wickedness, and downright rude insolence (to persons older than herself)? Apparently she is looking away across the undulating landscape, with its varied features of wood and meadow, of hedgerow and upland slope, emerging from the pale mists of the dawn; but there may be wholly other visions before her. Perhaps she is thinking of the olden days of romance and heroic adventure, when noble earls "came sounding through the town"; perhaps she is only thinking of New York, and of some facetious and correctly-dressed young man there. When one civilly bids her good-morning, she turns round with a startled look: clearly, her thoughts have been far away.

"Well," she says, "the more I see of England, the more I am surprised to think how such a wonderful lot of things should have happened in so small a place. And not only small, but—*but—empty.* The country seems dead. There's nobody in it. *Last night I was* reading about Warwick and Kenilworth, just

by way of preparation, you know, for I suppose we shall get there this evening. Well, where did all those great lords find the people to build splendid castles for them? Where did they get such sums of money? Where did all the armies come from that were in the Wars of the Roses?"

Now, the spectacle of a young mind in eager quest of knowledge is, as has been observed before, a pleasing sight; but it has to be pointed out to Miss Peggy that the study of English history ought to remain prohibited during the remainder of this trip, to avoid misconception, and for the better silencing of scandalous tongues.

"Ah, now," she says, plaintively, "isn't it hard that we should be subjected to such cruel taunts and suspicions? And so unjustly, too; that is the shameful part of it; if there was the smallest atom of foundation for the things they say of us, I shouldn't mind. I do really believe," she continues, with an air of solemn conviction, "that you and I are the two most absolutely perfect characters the world has ever known. I have never met with anyone just *quite* so good as we are. And, of course, that is the explanation. Perfect people are never properly comprehended. Their motives and conduct are always being misunderstood and misrepresented by the outside world: other people who are not perfect have to console themselves by being spiteful and envious. The only comfort is," adds Miss Peggy, complacently, "that you and I understand and appreciate each other; and they are welcome to say all those things about us as often as they please."

This was all very well; and, indeed, it was satisfactory to think that one had won the commendation of a being so confident of her own moral worth. But there was this to be considered about Peggy: that you could never be very sure of her. Indeed, when she was most amiable she was most to be distrusted: when she held out both hands to you in the frankest fashion, you had to beware lest they should turn out to be the two knobs of an electrical machine.

The next instant, with immovable face and inscrutable eyes, she remarks, in a casual kind of way:

"Mr. A'Becket is coming to Warwick".

"What?"

"Yes, he is."

"Well, you are—I declare you are ——"

"I?" she says, with a blank stare of innocence. "What have I to do with it?"

"Then how did he tell you and no one else of his coming?"

"Oh, as for that," she says, in a careless fashion, "he only mentioned it in going away—as a kind of possibility. If he had spoken of it to you, it might have looked like asking for an invitation. And perhaps he mayn't come, after all. I'm sure, if I were he, I wouldn't take the trouble."

"Probably not."

"I say," she continues, with a sudden change of manner (for she can be very friendly and confidential when she likes), "what made your wife look so strange last night when Mr. Duncombe was talking about Alfieri, and the Princess, and Prince Charles Edward?"

This was a large question, and one rather difficult to answer offhand; but just at this moment, as it happened, we were unexpectedly interrupted. There was a barge coming along, drawn by two donkeys, each with a nose-tin slung at its head; and along with them was a tall young bargeman, as handsome as Apollo, but with a sun-tan on his face and a mild fire in his eyes unknown to the marble figures in the Uffizi corridors. After a preliminary and rather diffident glance at the young lady, he made bold to ask us whether we were going on that day.

"Yes, certainly," was the answer.

"Then you'll have to make haste," said the sun-browned Apollo, "for they're going to repair Claydon Lock, and unless you get on at once, you won't get through till to-morrow."

Now, this was most unwelcome news; for, though it was well enough, once in a while, to spend a whole twenty-four hours by the side of a meadow, with speedwells, dandelions, pollard-willows, swifts, water-rats, and an occasional sheep, as our only companions, still we felt that we had not been making sufficient *progress, and we had* certainly calculated on reaching Warwick

that night. So there was nothing for it but to summon Murdoch forthwith, and bid him leave breakfast alone, and go and scour the neighbouring country in search of Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine. Of course, all this commotion had been heard within. Mrs. Threepenny-bit made her appearance at the bow, and said she would hang the whole ship's company if she wasn't safely deposited in Warwick town that very evening. Jack Duncombe popped out his head astern, and said that as soon as he had got his boots on he would go off and help to find our crew—in Cropredy they would be most likely, he added. In the midst of all this, Columbus, the horse, and the Horse-Marine simultaneously hove in sight; Murdoch, having espied them, at once returned to his duties in the pantry; and in the shortest time possible we were again under way, stealing along through the silent landscape.

Now, why was this young man so dense as not to see that on the previous evening he had grievously displeased his hostess by his flippant description of the fallen estate of Bonnie Prince Charlie? On this succeeding morning, at breakfast, he must needs revive the unlucky subject; and the moment he began he ought to have perceived that he was addressing Miss Peggy alone—Queen Tita preserved a proud silence, and would have nothing to do with him or his impertinent projects.

"The fact is," said he, with a pleasant facetiousness, after he had been reviewing the subject all over again, "that there is something just a trifle too farcical in the scene in which the dissipated old blackguard finds his young wife spirited away from him—there is a Palais Royal touch about it that I shall have to steer clear of if I meddle with the thing at all. You see, this is how matters stood: the conspirators—that is, Alfieri, and the Irishman, and his lady friend, Madame Orlandini—they knew they would have some difficulty in getting the Princess safely away and into a convent, even after they had got the permission of the Grand Duke; the elderly husband had to be dealt with, and he was as jealous and as suspicious as the very mischief. Very well, this was how they managed: one morning Madame Orlandini called upon the Princess and her husband

and asked them to drive with her to the convent—I forget the name of it—to see some articles manufactured by the nuns. It was a casual kind of visit, you understand. But when they got to the convent who should be there but the Irishman—quite by accident, of course—and as he was there anyway, he naturally escorted the ladies upstairs, leaving the Prince, who was fat and scant of breath, to follow as best he could. He did follow, and reached the landing; but the two ladies had disappeared; there was no one there but the Irishman, pretending to be very angry he had been shut out. Then your Bonnie Prince Charlie—I suppose he was beginning to suspect a trick—began to knock violently; and all the answer he got was that the Abbess appeared at a small grating, and civilly informed him, from behind it, that his wife had been received into the convent, and was now under the protection of the Grand Duchess. They say his rage was tremendous when he found out how he had been cheated; but the irate husband doesn't get much sympathy, especially if he is fat and elderly, and given to drink and beating his wife."

You should have seen Queen Tita's face all this time: she was far too indignant to speak.

"And did the Princess remain in the convent?" Miss Peggy asked, she being apparently as unobservant as himself of the effect produced on their hostess by this happy-go-lucky recital.

"Oh, dear, no. The Pope allowed her to retire to Rome; and the carriage she drove in was guarded by an escort of horsemen with Alfieri and the gay Irishman, both of them disguised and armed, on the box. I don't know that her husband ever saw her again. Why he didn't appeal to the Pope, I can't understand. Perhaps he wasn't in good odour—I suppose his habits were too notorious ——"

How long was this to go on? In order to get him away at any hazard from this fatal topic, one ventured to hint that, from the point of view of literary morality, it was perhaps hardly quite fair to make a real person like Alfieri the hero of a romance or a play.

"*Oh, as for that,*" said the young man, immediately and

happily rising to the lure, "you know the private lives of the great poets have always been considered common property in the world of letters. Didn't you ever read the novel about Milton and his second wife?—I think it was the second one. Why, Shakespeare has figured in fiction, both in Germany and England, in every possible condition of life—as a young lover, as an actor and boon companion in London, as a country gentleman living quietly in Stratford. I've seen Voltaire on the French stage—a representation of himself personally, I mean. I don't see much difference between writing about them and painting them; and you get a picture of Shakespeare in his cradle—well, that *is* playing it pretty low down—and you get Dante wandering through the air with Beatrice. My belief is that Alfieri would have been very much offended if you had considered him a private person. He left his own memoirs ——"

"Yes; and told us all about his life and his literary career that he thought it necessary should be known. Isn't that enough?"

"I wouldn't say it in print," continues this young man, confidentially; "I wouldn't sign my name to it in a review; but my private impression is that Alfieri has long before now been made a figure in literature. If 'Don Juan' wasn't suggested by some of Alfieri's earlier adventures—then I will eat my hat."

(This is the fashion in which young people of the present day discuss grave literary questions.)

"My belief is," continues our ingenuous young friend, as he contemplatively chips another egg—"my belief is that poetical genius is based on nothing more nor less than an infinite capacity for falling in love. What makes a bird sing? Alfieri says himself that it was always when he was in love with some woman or another that he produced his finest work—it was the desire to shine in her eyes that was his inspiration. Of course you want a certain amount of imagination to fall in love—I suppose the mass of mankind go through life without ever knowing what really being in love is, and without ever knowing that they don't know. But when you come to the people of great imagination, see how they can fall in love again and again—look at Goethe, at Burns, at Shelley, at Byron, at Milton ——"

"At least," says Queen Tita, sharply, "Milton had the grace to marry the women he fell in love with."

"Well, it isn't everyone who gets the chance of marrying three times," says this young man, with cool effrontery. Miss Peggy looks amused, but keeps her eyes downcast. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, addressing Murdoch, who happens to come into the saloon, asks him to write out a list of any things he may want in Warwick. She adds that we shall have our meals at an hotel to-morrow, so that he may have the more time to look over the town and the castle. For there is one person on board to whom she is always civil; and that is because he is a Highlander.

Well, we got through Claydon Lock easily enough; and thereafter entered upon a long stretch of eleven miles without any lock at all. This was by far the most lonely district into which we had as yet penetrated; and as the canal is here on a high level, we had a sufficiently spacious view of the richly-cultivated but apparently uninhabited country. Far as the eye could reach there was nothing visible but fields, hedgerows, and upland heights, with here and there a clump of trees or perhaps a solitary barn, a bit of red showing pleasantly enough among the prevailing greens. The day was brightening up, too; sweet, mild airs were blowing; there was even, now and again, a ray of watery sunlight striking on some distant slope. We began to wonder whether we had at last escaped from the rain that had pursued us so incessantly; for of course we did not want our pretty Miss Peggy to go away back to America with the impression that England was a land of perpetual mists.

One thing was certain: neither mist nor rain nor any other kind of weather was likely to upset that young lady's equanimity. She would have proved an invaluable acquisition on board the Ark, if she had been given her banjo, and her knitting, and perhaps, also, a young man or two to make a hash of, just by way of filling in the time. On this breezy, soft-aired morning, the uncertain look about the weather had no fears for her. She was the first to be ready to leave the boat for a stroll along the bank. But she was not the first to get ashore; *for Queen Tita called* on her to wait; and Miss Peggy, sitting

down complacently, amused herself by strumming "Oh, dem golden slippers!" until her friend was ready to join her.

And very soon, when all of us had got on land, we discovered Mrs. Threepenny-bit's dark design in thus carrying off the young lady all to herself. She was going to undo the evil that Jack Duncombe had done; and she happened to be very well qualified for the purpose. In the absolute silence of this uninhabited district, we two who were following could hear distinctly enough; and what we heard was an elaborate discourse on the character, career, and sad misfortunes of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, accompanied by such an abundance of minute detail and anecdote that even Miss Peggy was surprised, and was forced to ask her friend how she came to hear of all these things.

"Well," we overheard her say, "I suppose it was partly through our knowing the Camerons of Inverfask, and being interested that way; but all kinds of narratives and journals have been published, so that the whole story of Prince Charlie's adventures in the Highlands has been told, down to the smallest circumstance. What became of him after, or what he became—well I never heard much about that; but what I do know is that there must have been something very extraordinary and fascinating about the character of a man who was able to do what he did. Fancy his landing at Borrodale with only seven companions—the Highland chiefs on whom he most depended entirely opposed to the enterprise—the people not knowing him even by sight; and yet within a couple of months he had got together an enthusiastic army, had taken Edinburgh, had beaten the English General sent against him, and was fairly on his way to London. Surely the young man who could do that must have been possessed of some unusual qualities: don't you think so, Peggy? From the very outset it was one difficulty after another to get over; anyone with less courage and resolution would have given up the whole affair—anyone with less personal fascination of character—for it all depended on that—could have done nothing with men who tried from the very beginning to get him to go back. Boisdale—he was one of the Macdonalds, I think—went to see him even

before he landed, and begged him to return to France. Young Clanranald assured him that the project was quite hopeless. Why, when Cameron of Lochiel—and everybody says there would have been no rising at all but for him—when he set out to meet the Prince he was as much opposed to it as any of them; and yet his brother, Cameron of Fassiefern, knew quite well what would happen if he came under his influence. Lochiel had to pass Fassiefern on his way—some day, Peggy, I hope you and I will have a drive along Glenfinnan, and I will show you all the places—and Fassiefern came out and tried hard to stop him. 'Brother,' he said, 'if the Prince once sets his eyes on you, he will make you do whatever he pleases.' Of course Lochiel yielded like the others; and it was this same Lochiel—'the gentle Lochiel'—long afterwards, after Culloden, when Prince Charlie and he and the rest of them were exiles in France—it was that same Lochiel who hung back from accepting the command of a French regiment that was offered him, and kept urging the Prince to make another effort in Scotland. And you think that this young Charles Stuart—coming almost alone to the country—could have induced those men to risk their lives, their estates, and the prospects of their families, without his having most unusual qualities of character—yes, and force of will, and personal courage as well?"

Now, it is to be observed that Miss Peggy had brought no such charge; she was listening to this laudation of Prince Charles with the most amiable attention; plainly the taunt was thrown out for the benefit of anyone who might be listening behind.

"Peggy," she continues (the arms of these two are interlinked, and they are supposed to be in very private confabulation together; but nevertheless we hear every word), "I wish we could get Colonel Cameron to come along with us for a few days, just to show you what kind of men they were who joined the Young Chevalier. I think he is every way fit to be a kinsman of 'the gentle Lochiel'; but, gentle or not gentle, the Camerons can fight. And I suppose fighting is to be his *trade to the end now.* Poor Inverfask! I am quite sure he

had always the idea of leaving the service as soon as he could afford it—for he is not very well off, you know—and settling down on his small place in the Highlands, and making what he could of it. I suppose he would take a command in the local Militia; and if the place swallowed up too much in the way of improvements, I daresay he would have let the autumn shooting to some rich Liverpool or Manchester man. But his young wife died—what a dear, gentle creature she was!—and so I dare say he will stick to his soldiering to the end. Well, at all events, when we get back to London, we must arrange an evening for him to come and dine with us; and then you will see the kind of man who went 'out' in '45; for of course a generation or two can't have made much difference in the blood, though all the circumstances are different. Do you know what blood was in the veins of Prince Charles Stuart?—the blood of John Sobieski; and he showed himself worthy of it. But still there must have been some extraordinary personal glamour about this young man that captured everyone he came across, rich and poor alike. The women, of course you know, all went mad about him; though they weren't all quite so lucky as Miss Edmonstone ——"

"Who was she?" the innocent disciple asks; whereupon Mrs. Threepenny-bit smiles a little: perhaps she is trying to imagine Miss Peggy in Miss Edmonstone's place.

"That was when Prince Charles was marching south from Perth. The gentlewomen in the neighbourhood of Doune had come out to welcome him and offer him some refreshment; and it was the daughters of Mr. Edmonstone who were to serve him. Well, when he had drunk the wine and returned the glass, they asked to be permitted to kiss his Royal Highness's hand; but there was a cousin of theirs standing by who said she would rather 'pree his Royal Highness's mou'". Perhaps this was a little joke on her part; perhaps she counted on his not being able to understand—and he didn't understand, any more than you do, Peggy, my dear; but the speech was immediately explained to him by his companions, and at once he stooped down, and lifted the young lady in his arms, and kissed her

heartily. So if it was a joke, she was paid out for it; but they say the other ladies of the district were very envious and thought she had got more than her share. They say, too, that his manner towards women was just the perfection of courtesy ——"

If, at this moment, Jack Duncombe had dared to say a word he would probably have muttered, "Yes; especially when he was beating his wife"; but the smallest remark would have been overheard; so he was compelled to go in silence, listening to this wild eulogium of Prince Charles—a eulogium that was not only in a manner levelled at his own head, but that also effectually deprived him of all chance of enjoying Miss Peggy's companionship during this morning's stroll.

"He invariably rose whenever Flora Macdonald entered the room, no matter what business was going on. They say that when he was at Holyrood his charm of manner quite won the hearts of the young Scotch ladies, and that numbers of them—like Miss Lumsden—bade their lovers go and fight for Prince Charlie, or give them up for ever. Yes; and some of them gave him more substantial aid. Did you ever hear of Colonel Anne, Peggy?"

"No," answers Miss Peggy.

And here again the small mite of a woman laughs a little; for she has a prodigious and heroic valour of imagination, though she will skip on to a chair at sight of a blackbeetle.

"She was the wife of Mackintosh of Mackintosh; and while he was a captain in the loyal Militia, she raised a whole regiment for the Chevalier—of her own clan and the Farquharsons; and joined them herself. The joke of it was that her husband was some time afterward taken prisoner and brought into her presence. 'Your servant, Captain,' she said. 'Your servant, Colonel,' he answered. There is another story told about her that will show you what spirit she had. After Culloden she was taken prisoner and sent to London; but they set her free before long; and the Duke of Cumberland invited her to a ball, and to the ball she went. Very well; the *first tune played* was 'Up and waur them a, Willie,' and

Cumberland asked her to dance with him, which she did; then she said, 'Now that I have danced to your tune, will you dance to mine?' Of course, he couldn't refuse; and what must she do but call for 'The auld Stuarts back again!' Well: she had her revenge; but still—still, I think I would rather not have heard of brave Colonel Anne dancing with Butcher Cumberland."

Here the rampant little Jacobite was interrupted by a distant sound that gradually came nearer and nearer, and increased and increased until we knew by the whirr and rattle that a train was going by somewhere, though we could not see it. The disturbance was quite startling in the silence to which we had grown used; we resented it almost; it was a message from the far outside world to people who had forsaken it, and almost forgotten the existence of railway stations, and porters, and hansom-cabs. But presently the hubbub had ceased; stillness reigned around; we were left alone once more with the silent woods and meadows, the placid water, and the pale sunlight that here and there warmed the upland slopes, under the darker sky-line of the trees.

"Then there was Lady Kilmarnock," continues this furious partisan of five-foot-three (and all this is for the pious edification of Miss Peggy, who has been tampered with by heretics); "she didn't raise a regiment; but I don't know that she didn't do Prince Charles a greater service still. Well, well, Peggy, it's a terrible story of a woman's duplicity; I know *you* would not do such a thing even for a Prince Charlie. But she happened to be at Callander House when General Hawley and his English troops arrived to drive away the Highlanders from the siege of Stirling; and on the very morning of the battle of Falkirk she sent an invitation to General Hawley to come and breakfast with her. I think he might have suspected; Lord Kilmarnock was with the Prince; she was known to be a warm adherent of the Stuarts. However, she was very good-looking and very charming; and Hawley thought he could drive the Highlanders away just whenever he pleased; and so he went. Yes, Peggy, he went; and it was a bad day for him that he did.

Even when his own officers sent him word that the Highlanders were in motion, he wouldn't come away from Callander House. They say that Lady Kilmarnock had very pleasant manners; and of course she would talk about something interesting—history, perhaps—English history, perhaps—do you hear, Peggy?"

"Yes?" says the young lady, innocently.

"By mid-day," the duodecimo historian continues, "Prince Charles had made all his arrangements for an attack; and the English were without their General He was still at Callander House."

"And what was the end of it?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Why, the English lost the battle of Falkirk, that was all; and General Hawley, who had been enjoying the interesting conversation of Lady Kilmarnock all the morning, was in the evening in full retreat towards Linlithgow."

"Ah, I see," observes Miss Peggy, gravely. "You might say that he had run his ship fast aground—opposite Magna Charta island."

"Yes," observes Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who is far too eager in her proselytising to heed this piece of impertinence, "the women of Scotland did what they could for Bonnie Prince Charlie! I wonder, Peggy, if I could get for you some account of the homage they paid to Flora Macdonald when she was at Leith, in the ship that was taking her a prisoner to London. Whole crowds of ladies, many of them persons of great distinction, went to see her, and took all kinds of presents with them. One of them said, 'I could wipe your shoes with pleasure, and would count it an honour so to do'. Another said, 'Surely you are the happiest woman in the world'. And another—Lady Mary Cochrane that was—stayed on board all night, and begged Miss Macdonald to let her share her cabin, so that she might say that she had had the honour of lying in the same bed with one who had been so happy as to be guardian to her Prince. And even that was nothing to the enthusiasm that Flora created in London, after she was set free, and living as the guest of Lady Primrose

"Hi! You people in front there! What is all this farrago about the '45 Rebellion? What are you trying to prove?"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit turns round for a second.

"I am trying to prove," she says, with audacious calmness, "that it is impossible for Peggy to go back to America without having met Colonel Cameron: she must see what a Highlander is like."

It was about mid-day that our Argonauts were greatly surprised—and perhaps a little bit cheered—by espying in the far distance a cluster of human habitations. Perched on the top of a hill was a conspicuous toy of a church; and along the slopes and trending down to the valley was a straggling mass of houses and cottages, the red brick and blue slate of which gave the place an odd purple look in the middle of the wide green landscape. It was the village of Napton, we learned, where we were to leave the Oxford canal and turn off westward by the Napton and Warwick. But before reaching the junction we had of course to descend from the high level that had yielded us so (historically) interesting a walk; and as the operation of going down a hill, by means of a series of canal-locks, is just a trifle tedious, we abandoned our noble vessel to the care of Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine, and took refuge in the saloon, where luncheon was already laid out.

Now it is just possible that by this time our young Dramatist had begun to perceive what a fatal mistake he had made the night before; but he need not now have proceeded deliberately to make matters worse by proposing modifications of his unhappy scheme. He would have been much wiser to have said not one word more about the unlucky book or play, whichever it was to be. He was clever at dressing salads, and opening cases of tinned meats, and might have confined himself to these useful occupations. But no. Perhaps it grieved him to see Miss Peggy so completely carried off from him, to be lectured about the Highland clans. Perhaps he thought that by currying favour with this Jenny Wren of a Jacobite he might hope to have a little of the younger lady's companionship

restored to him. At all events, we had scarcely sat down at table, when he began, quite jauntily and airily—

"Well, Miss Rosslyn, what do you think of the Young Chevalier now? I heard you were being shown a different picture of him this morning. Oh, yes, there is much to be said on that side; and I dare say, at one period of his life, he must have been rather an attractive and interesting kind of personage. Of course I take the later period—my story happens then; and it is necessary for my purpose that there should be a dark foil to the brilliant character of Alfieri—the darker the better. And yet, you know, if I should ever take up the thing, I don't think I would represent Bonnie Prince Charlie, even in his later days, as being absolutely contemptible ——"

(This was the young man's idea of putting matters straight!)

"— no, not absolutely contemptible. I would have glimpses of his former self appear through his drunken stupor; I would make him maunder about his brave Highlanders, and all that kind of thing, don't you know. My private impression is that it was his brave Highlanders who taught him the use of the whisky-bottle—still, I suppose when they were skulking in the hills they were glad to get anything—and he must have come through a good deal of privation when he was being hunted from island to island ——"

And at last Queen Tita breaks silence; she can bear this no longer.

"Privation!" she says, with a touch of indignant tremor in her voice. "Yes, privation such as might make people silent with pity over whatever he became towards the end of his life. I don't know what that was; I would rather not inquire; I suppose few have ever experienced such cruel disappointments and mortifications; and I don't know what habits he may have acquired in these later years; but I do know this—I know that when he was crossing from Uist to Skye, they had with them only half-a-bottle of white wine—it was all the soldiers had left at Clanranald's house—and he *would not touch it*: every drop was to be saved for Flora

Macdonald. And I know that when Malcolm Macleod was guiding him across Skye, and there was only one glass of brandy, he made Malcolm drink it, as needing it more than himself. I remember," she continues, turning to Miss Peggy, as if the young man were no longer worth talking to, "being told where that bottle is still preserved, for Macleod hid it in the heather, and picked it up afterwards. Well, there is this to be said, Peggy: that in all the privations they had to go through—starving for days sometimes, and sleeping in wet caves at night—the Prince always kept the most undaunted heart of them all. He would turn his hand to anything—kindling a fire, cooking a dinner when they had anything to cook, hauling a boat up on shore, or singing songs to cheer the sailors when they were dead-beat with their rowing. Old men who had fought for him at Culloden, and made their way back to the glens, burst into tears when they found him in such a pitiable plight; but he was always stout-hearted and cheerful and making the best of his circumstances. And very ungrateful he must have been, in these later years, whatever he was, if he did not think sometimes of his brave Highlanders. Such loyalty, I do believe, was never seen before. Imagine those poor people, each one of them knowing that he or she could go and get £30,000 by telling the nearest Captain of Militia where the Prince was hiding, and not one of them yielding to the temptation! Why, at Coradale, in Uist, there were more than a hundred people knew quite well where he was, and not one of them would betray him. The very officers who were searching for him could not help admiring such faithfulness. Just think of this, Peggy—there was a poor fellow called Macleod—Macleod or Macdonald, I forget which—who had piloted the boat the Prince escaped in, and he was taken prisoner, and brought before General Campbell. He confessed at once to having been with the Prince. 'Don't you know,' said the General to him, 'what money is put on that gentleman's head? No less than £30,000, which would have made you and your family happy for ever.' 'What, then?' was the answer of the poor fellow. 'What though I had

gotten it? My conscience would have got the better of me, and I would not have enjoyed it two days. And although I could have gotten all England and Scotland put together, I would not have allowed a hair of his head to be injured, since he was under my care.' Do you know what the General said, Peggy? He said, 'I cannot much blame you'. And surely you cannot think that such extraordinary devotion could have been aroused except by one who had some very unusual qualities of character? Mind you, it wasn't merely their loyalty to their chiefs. When young Clanranald hesitated at the beginning, his clan told him they would go out, whether he headed them or not. No, I don't seek to know what habits the disappointed and unhappy man may have fallen into in his last years; but it was no mean or contemptible person who could awaken such loyalty and devotion; and, what is more, it was no mean or contemptible person who, even after his misfortunes, was so much of a hero to the people of Paris that the French King himself was vexed and envious because of his great popularity and the admiration and sympathy that were shown for him. Mr. Duncombe, you may turn the Young Chevalier into a drunken old reprobate, if you like; but I think you will make a mistake: for one thing, you will get no one to believe you."

This was a pretty warm defence of the last of the Stuarts, coming as it did from a small mite of an Englishwoman who had picked up her Jacobite sentiments simply through having stayed on one or two occasions at Inverfask House and been told something about the relics in the hall there. And as Jack Duncombe was beginning to make a few feeble excuses—saying he might not take up the subject at all, and that, if he did, he would introduce reminiscences of the hapless Prince's more heroic days—suddenly a shaft of sunlight shot into the saloon; and, that being always a welcome signal, it was suggested by one of us to Miss Peggy that she might come outside and take the tiller, and see a little more of this country of England.

Despite that stray shaft of sunlight, however, we found the *day had not* improved during our sojourn within; there was now

half-a-gale sweeping over from the south-west; the yellow waters of the canal were driven into lapping waves; and a reservoir hard by—near to Stockton Grange it is—was changed into a miniature sea, with white foam springing from its embankments. It was all very striking and picturesque, no doubt: the bent and swaying trees, the hurrying clouds with their purple shadows and silvery lights, and the occasional gleams of sunshine that struck here and there on spinney or hill; but we began to wish, in the most modest and respectful way (and especially as we should be wandering through the Forest of Arden within the next day or two) for just a trifle of decently quiet weather. We were *not* landscape artists. We had promised ourselves still moonlight nights in these remote districts, with Miss Peggy and her banjo at the bow of the boat, trying to charm the fairies out into the open glades with a kind of music they had never heard before. But now we were encountering nothing but a series of juvenile tornadoes; and we were beginning to feel annoyed.

Nevertheless, that evening improved very considerably: the wind abating; the clouds banking themselves up into heavy masses overhead; while along the western skies there were silver rifts that seemed slowly and steadily widening. Indeed, the heavy darkness overhead made that white glory in the west all the more vivid and alluring; and when, at length, through some sudden parting of the clouds, a flood of sunlight swept across the corn-fields and the hedges and the daisied meadows, the effect was quite bewildering. It was Miss Peggy who was at the helm. She insisted that she could not see, the glare was so strong. So we had the boat stealthily stopped; Murdoch was quietly summoned; those people within—the one of them letter-writing, the other, no doubt, inventing situations sufficient to make a Strand audience gasp with emotion—were left to themselves; and the two congenial souls on board this ship—the two who were not likely to let their friendship strike and founder on any idiotic rock of historical sentiment—were free to walk away by themselves into that western world of light, conversing on subjects so serious and exalted that it would be a pity to put them down here, lest they should be misunderstood.

The evening drew on apace; but momentarily it became more beautiful. It really seemed as if we had come out from under those lurid storm clouds into a region of mellow radiance and perpetual calm. The still surface of the canal was a golden pathway before us; overhead, such spaces of the sky as were now clear were of a pale blue, just touched here and there with a flake of saffron cloud. Of course, this brilliancy could not last. Slowly the wild fires in the west paled down. As we drew near to Radford Simele (we were all on board again now) there was a wan twilight on the water; and as we stole through the outskirts of Leamington Priors the windows and lamps gleamed orange through the gathering grey dusk.

Night came down. We passed under mysterious bridges. Here and there a mass of black building or a tall chimney rose into the faintly lilac sky; here and there a yellow ray of light burned in the dark. We could hear, but barely see, our noble Captain and his crew as they made their way through the prevailing gloom. And then it seemed to us as if we were passing into the country again. Where was Warwick? We knew that it was but a mile or two from Leamington; but here were we among meadows, with no more sign of a town than we had met with on the lonely level between Claydon Lock and Napton Hill. In the midst of our perplexity, the Nameless Barge—that has been coming through these sombre shades as noiselessly as a bat—slowly ceases to move; and Captain Columbus appears with his report.

We must remain where we are, it seems; for the next lock-gate is locked. Warwick is three-quarters of a mile away, across the fields. Then comes the question, put to the popular vote, as to whether we should make our way into the town (there is a moon somewhere behind the clouds, and those meadows are beginning to show grey, with the hedges black between) or spend the evening on board, with such entertainment as we may be able to devise for ourselves. It is unanimously resolved that we remain on board.

Late that night, Mrs. Threepenny-bit happened to bethink her *of putting postage* stamps on the letters that had occupied

her in the afternoon; and while doing so she pushed one of the envelopes across the little table to Miss Peggy.

"There, Peggy, do you see to whom I have been writing?"

The young lady took up the letter and read the address, "*To Colonel Sir Ewen Cameron, V.C., K.C.B., Aldershot Camp, Hampshire*"; and upon her asking what "V.C." meant, her hostess seemed quite proud to give her the information. But with regard to the contents of the letter (which one of us made bold to suspect were the concrete result of all the vague historical squabbling that had taken place during the day) the astute small person chose to hold her peace.

CHAPTER XII.

"And in that Manor now no more
Is cheerful feast and sprightly ball;
For ever since that dreary hour
Have spirits haunted Cumnor Hall.

"The village maids, with fearful glance,
Avoid the ancient, moss-grown wall;
Nor ever lead the merry dance
Among the groves of Cumnor Hall.

"Full many a traveller oft hath sighed,
And pensive wept the Countess' fall,
As wandering onwards they've espied
The haunted towers of Cumnor Hall."

"YOUR servant, Colonel!" says a tall and slim young lady, as she appears at the door of the saloon, and makes a very fair imitation of a military salute.

But. if Mrs. Threepenny-bit—or Colonel Anne, as she is supposed to be—has any wish to check the young person's impertinence, it so happens that she has just had the means placed at her disposal.

"Look here, Peggy," she says, "Mr. Duncombe has been over to the town, and was kind enough to ask for letters. This one is for you; and the post-mark is Oxford."

"Oh, thank you," Miss Peggy says to the young man; "I'm sure I never should have thought of asking for letters at Warwick: I told them Stratford-on-Avon; for I suppose we shall stay there a day or two."

"But, Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit again, "the post-mark is Oxford: what friends have you in Oxford?"

"It may be a bill," she says, carelessly, as she takes the envelope in her hand and proceeds to open it, "though I *thought we had* paid for everything. Oh, no, it's from Mr. *A'Becket.*"

She ran her eye over the two or three pages in a negligent fashion.

"Oh, he can't get away at present—did I tell you he spoke of coming over to Warwick to see how we were getting along? —and—and there are some inscriptions in a church in Bath that we are to look at—and Gloucester Cathedral—coloured figures on tombs—oh, I dare say, we shall find all that in the guide-books. Then there are kind regards and remembrances to everybody—that's all."

She put the letter into her pocket with a fine air of indifference. Mrs. Threepenny-bit said not a word. Murdoch came in with breakfast; and presently we were all at table.

Now, Miss Peggy was in the highest of spirits; perhaps because of the unwonted brightness and cheerfulness of the morning, perhaps because she was looking forward with an eager interest to this ancient town we were about to enter. All her talk—which chiefly consisted of questions—was of earls, and tournaments, and crusades; of Simon De Montford, and Piers Gavestone, and "the black hound of Arden"; of pleasances, and moats, and battlements.

"It will be just splendid!" she exclaimed. "Oh, you don't understand a bit—you can't understand: why, all that mediæval time reads to me like a fairy tale; it is so far away; it isn't real; you can't believe in it. But when you come to see the actual walls—the towers built by So-and-so and So-and-so—the tilting-yard—the gardens—the great kitchens—and all that, then you begin to think that the things actually happened and that the tremendous festivities really took place. Say, now how big must that round table have been that could let hundred knights and a hundred ladies sit down to dinner all at once?"

Naturally we looked to Jack Duncombe for the desired information. He was smart at figures; the calculation was not an abstruse one; and he ought to have sympathised with the laudable curiosity shown by our young American friend. Perhaps he did not hear; perhaps he was in a resentful mood; anyhow he took no notice of her question. Indeed, it was

patent to all of us that throughout this meal he was most unusually preoccupied and silent; and when, some time thereafter, we had packed a few things together, and were ready to set forth for the town, he did not offer to accompany Miss Peggy (who was first ashore as usual) but hung behind and followed with his hostess. So far as we could hear, the conversation between these two was of a somewhat intermittent character—though Queen Tita was as courteous as ever; for her quarrels are soon over, and not a word had been said about Prince Charlie all the morning.

But as for this Rosslyn girl, as we walked along the pleasant country road towards the town, she appeared to have taken leave of her senses altogether. Perhaps the unaccustomed sunlight had got into her brain; perhaps she was enjoying a fierce delight in her release from the strict surveillance that hemmed her in on board the Nameless Barge; at all events, a dafter lassie could not that morning have been found within the shores of these three islands. It was conundrums she was busy with. Where she had got them—or whether she had made them herself—it was impossible to say; but about her implacable persistence in propounding them there could be no doubt. Short of throwing her over the fence there was no way of escape from her. And what a diabolical ingenuity ran through those insanities; and with what an amiable innocence —with what serious, scarcely-smiling lips, and grave, sweet eyes —she continued her maddening questions!

"Come, now, I will give you an easy one ——"

"Oh, go away with you!"

"No, but really this is a very simple one—even you might find it out. Come now, have a try. I wouldn't give in, if I were a man; I would have a try, anyway. I thought men never were afraid of anything; at least they pretend never to be afraid."

"Sometimes they are. Sometimes they are afraid of being bitten—when they find themselves in a lonely country road, *with* a creature gone mad."

"*I suppose* you think that is sarcasm. Well, never mind.

Tell me this, now—Why is Lord Wolseley the most extraordinary General that ever lived?"

"Oh, what do you know about Lord Wolseley!"

"I ask you a simple question, and you can't answer it. Men think themselves so clever—and yet you can't answer that! Well, I'll tell you. I'll have pity on you. I wouldn't leave you to worry your head all day about a simple thing like that. It's because he not only took Cairo, but Damietta."

"Look here, young lady, let me give you a solemn warning: those people are not more than six yards behind, and if you don't take care, you'll be getting 'what for'. How would you like to be sent back to the boat, and shut up on bread and water?"

"I did think you could answer a simple question," the demon continues; but suddenly she alters her tone. "Well, now, what kind of a building is that?"

We had come in view of a remarkably handsome structure, close to the roadside, but most picturesquely embowered in foliage—the fragrant lilac trees, in full blossom, being chiefly conspicuous.

"I should say it was a jail."

"A jail? Oh, I suppose they ought to make the outside of a jail attractive. That's moral. The outside of a jail ought to be the most attractive side of it. Say, don't you feel a kind of satisfaction in going past a jail—on the outside?"

"I don't know that I do."

"That isn't the feeling you have? Perhaps it's rather more a kind of surprise?"

"Very good—very good; we are getting on. That is what the young people of the present day call manners. This is their respect for age. I shouldn't be surprised to see two she-bears come out from behind those bushes and rend you in bits."

"I say," she continues—just as if this suddenly confidential appeal were the most natural thing in the world, "what is the matter with Mr. Duncombe?"

"You, most likely."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he may have been forming exalted ideas of the feminine character—young men are soft-headed enough to do that sometimes, you know. And then—and then—he may have seen a young lady unblushingly open a letter—yes, and read the contents aloud, too—a letter from a middle-aged Oxford don whom she has bamboozled out of his senses in the course of a couple of evenings. He may have been shocked by such a display of callousness ——"

"Oh, nothing of the sort. Don't you make any mistake," says Miss Peggy, with decision (and it may be admitted that she has observant eyes). "There is something troubling him —something serious."

"Perhaps it's Prince Charlie."

"Well, how could he be so stupid as to bring up that—that absurd story again and again when he ought to have seen he was vexing your wife?" says Miss Peggy, who seemed to have recovered her sanity. "And I'm sure she is right. There must have been something fine and heroic about the young Prince; or he couldn't have won the hearts of all those people in such a fashion. I think—yes, I think if I had been with those Edmonstone girls, I should have been a little bit envious, too—of the cousin, I mean."

"Really? Another convert to the white cockade?"

"What do you think, now, about that letter last night?" she continues. "Do you think she has asked Colonel Cameron to come and sail with us for a bit?—you know she was hinting at it."

"More likely she has written to tell him we shall be returning through the southern counties, and asking him if he would care to ride over from Aldershot, when we are at some near point, and lunch with us. That is more likely, I fancy. But why do you ask? Have you any curiosity about him, simply because he is a Cameron, and related to some of the people who were out in the '45?"

"Why, of course!" she says, with a quick glance of surprise. "*It* makes all those things seem so much more near and actual *But I don't think* I could ever get you to understand—I mean,

how it strikes anyone brought up in America. By-the-way, sometimes I hear your wife speaking of him as 'Inverfask': is that the way he is ordinarily addressed?"

"No, not ordinarily. His neighbours in the North would call him 'Inverfask'. Then the people on his own place speak of him as 'The Cornel'. Then he is 'Ewen' to his family; and 'Cameron' to his intimates, and 'Sir Ewen' or 'Colonel Cameron' to acquaintances: so that you have plenty of variety, you see."

"And you always put 'V.C.' on the envelope, if you are writing to him?" asks this diligent student of old-world ways.

"Generally."

"Is he so very proud of it?"

"There is not much vanity about the Cornel. But the Victoria Cross is the proudest thing that an Englishman can wear; and it is open to any soldier to win—the private in the ranks as well as his officer."

"For some special act of courage in battle?" she continues, thoughtfully. "I think if I were a man I should be proud to have that; and you might say it was vanity if you liked. It is curious what different ambitions people have. I suppose, now, what Mr. Duncombe mostly thinks about is being called on the stage after the production of a play, and having all the critics praise it next morning."

"If Mr. Duncombe doesn't mind," one says to her, "the critics will arise and tear him piecemeal. I hear he has been writing an article on the present lamentable condition of the British drama, and no doubt he puts all the mischief down to those bold, bad, heartless men."

"What is Colonel Cameron like?" she asks, with a suddenness which shows how little concerned she is about the condition of the British or any other drama.

"When you see him, you will probably call him a long, red-headed Scotchman—that's about all."

"Rather blunt—and—and overbearing, is he?"

"Overbearing! He comes of the same stock as 'the gentle Lochiel'."

"And yet the Camerons are a fighting race, aren't they?—there are so many references ——"

"Oh, yes, they have done a little in that way—now and again—during the past century or two."

"I should like to see him," she says, simply; and then her attention is claimed by the buildings of the town of Warwick, which lies before us.

And, indeed, it is quite a pleasant task to be cicerone to this young American person, as we go along these wide, quiet, old-fashioned streets; for her quick appreciation of anything shown her—especially if it have any kind of historical interest—needs no spurring; while she herself has a sharp eye for any ancient gateway or similar relic surviving among more modern stonework. Moreover, she is now introduced for the first time to the Warwickshire cottage of brick and timber, with its overhanging eaves, its peaked gables, and its casements studded with small green panes. And nothing will do for Miss Peggy but that to one of these old houses—to this one, she says, or that one over there—William Shakespeare used often to come on a visit, or perhaps on business. Of course he would ride over from Stratford (she says) and come up this very street; and pull up his horse just there—by the side of that causeway, and give the bridle to a lad to hold; and then go up those steps to the door. Would that be the same knocker—that knocker there? Or most likely, in this quiet place, the door would be open; he would simply walk in, and call for the people of the house.

"Yes," said Miss Peggy, contemplatively. "I think he would have rather a loud voice—being good-humoured and merry—and the people mightn't be there—he would call for them. And of course the first thing they would do, on recognising the voice, would be to hurry away one of the maids to fetch a jug of ale and some cakes. Cecily or Dorothy, it might be, and I suppose she would run quickly. I should, if in her place ——"

"*Peggy, whatever* are you staring at?" said Mrs. Three-*penny-bit, happening* to come up at this moment.

"Oh, nothing," the girl answered—rather absently—and went on again.

But when it came to be a question of churches, choirs, monuments, mural inscriptions, and so forth, one found one's occupation entirely gone. It was Miss Peggy who was guide. It was she who took us to the tomb of Thomas Earl of Warwick, and knew all about his having fought in the Holy Land, and at Cressy and Poictiers. It was she who discovered for us the sarcophagus bearing the words—"Fulke Greville, Servant to Queen Elizabeth, Counsellor to King James, and Friend to Sir Philip Sidney". And when we came to the two marble figures of the Earl and Countess of Leicester, she knew that it was not the hapless Amy Robsart who was lying there in the silence, her hands clasped in stony prayer, but Leicester's third wife, Lettice Knowles. We had no idea that this young American stranger had been so diligent a student. It quite reconciled us (after many long years of abstention) to figuring in the capacity of tourists. And her interest in these old things was so fresh, so natural, and so unstinted that it was beautiful to look at. Even when we had got back to our hotel to lunch, she was all eagerness and chatter about what she had seen and what she was going to see.

But the equanimity of our small party was now about to receive an unexpected shock. We were discussing plans. We had discovered that the Avon is not navigable between Stratford and Tewkesbury; and so had resolved to get round to the Severn by the Warwick and Birmingham Canal. Meanwhile we could certainly get by canal as far as Stratford; but as we should have to turn back there, it was proposed, in order to avoid going over this part of the route twice, to send on the Nameless Barge under care of Captain Columbus, while we should run through to Stratford by rail (thus giving Miss Peggy as much time there as possible) and then join the ship again, to continue our voyage northward and westward. What, then, was our astonishment, to hear Jack Duncombe calmly say to his hostess, who had been putting some questions to him—

"I am afraid, if it comes to that, I must ask you to leave me out. I—I am very sorry—but I fear I shall have to go back to London. Of course, it isn't like breaking up the party—you can easily get someone to take my place. I assure you I am sorry enough to go, for the trip so far has been most delightful; and you will soon be getting to even more interesting districts; but I think—yes, I think it will be safer if you count me out."

For a second there was an awkward silence; Mrs. Threepenny-bit seemed afraid to ask him the reason for this sudden resolve.

"I hope it is nothing serious?" she ventured to say, however.

"Oh, no, I think not," he answered, evasively; and then he added: "I should fancy you will find it all plain sailing now until you get to the Severn; and then you'll want a steam-tug or something of the kind to take you down to Bristol. I will get to know whether the Thames and Severn Canal is navigable, in case you should prefer to return that way, and drop you a line. The Kennet and Avon Canal, I know, is open."

He was talking in quite a matter-of-fact fashion; but he seemed depressed a little. Then, when luncheon was over, he said he would walk along to the telegraph-office, and join us subsequently at the Castle, whither we were shortly bound. At the same moment Miss Peggy went away to her own room, to fetch her guide-books; and the instant she had shut the door behind her, Queen Tita was free to express her astonishment—and her suspicions.

"Now really do you think that wretch has been at her tricks again?" she demands.

"What wretch?—what tricks?"

"Why, what should he be going away for so suddenly if he hadn't quarrelled with her?" she says. "What other reason can there be? Oh, I know she was pretending to behave very well; and you would have thought there was nothing between them but ordinary acquaintanceship—well, I don't know—he *has been very devoted*—and all I cared about it was that no *blame could fall* on me—it would have been a very good match

if it had been a match. But what can this mean? Surely he can't be so hard hit that he must needs be mightily offended because she has been amusing herself a little with Mr. A'Becket —and getting a letter or two ——"

"You don't imagine he is such a fool; what could it matter to him her getting twenty dozen letters from Mr A'Becket?"

"Oh, you don't know. She is pretty clever at leading people on—even when she pretends to be most innocent And if it isn't that, what is it?" demands this creature again, whose very ignorance she brings forward as an argument. "However, if he wishes to go, I suppose we must let him go. And it would be such a chance to get Colonel Cameron to come along ——"

"His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief might have a word to say," it is humbly observed.

"Oh, that's all right; they can always get leave," says *our* Commander-in-Chief. "That letter I posted to him this morning—well, it was only a general kind of invitation—asking him if he would care to come and see us *en voyage* at any point in the south there; but I could telegraph and tell him we had now a spare berth for him, if he wished to join at once. He will get the letter to-morrow, I suppose? We shall be at Stratford. Wouldn't that do very well, if I telegraphed from Stratford to-morrow or next day?"

Now observe, that is the gratitude of women. Here was a young man who had taken unheard-of trouble in arranging this expedition for us, and who had promised himself in reward the enjoyment of a long idling holiday in this ghostly-nomadic fashion; and when he is suddenly arrested in mid-career, and signs an order for his own dismissal, she doesn't protest at all, or entreat him to stay, or make decent expression of regret—she immediately seizes the opportunity to send for a substitute more to her liking. And why more to her liking? Because she has some foolishly romantic sentiment about Bonnie Prince Charlie, and wants to convince her young American acquaintance—through being introduced to one of the Camerons—that Prince Charles Edward was a gallant hero, and one of the

most hardly-treated of mortals. Such is woman's gratitude—and woman's logic. Jack Duncombe might go if he wished and welcome, if only she could get Cameron of Inverfask to take his place. This was the result of our young Dramatist's unfortunate vaunting of his Alfieri project. Peggy must see the kind of men who went out in the '45 to follow the white cockade of the Chevalier. Nor had Mrs. Tom-tit any regard either for the interests of England; Sir Ewen Cameron must needs be summoned away from his serious duties at Aldershot —all to convince this young minx of an American.

And when that daughter of the Stars and Stripes reappeared —as she did almost directly—one was almost ashamed to see how radiant, and cheerful, and self-complacent she was. Even supposing that she had nothing to do with the young man's so suddenly parting company with us, at least she might have affected some little sorrow. If compunction was out of the question, if her heart was incapable of experiencing any such emotion, at least she could have said it was a pity he was leaving. Had he not been her devoted slave all the way through? Had he not mended pencils for her, and tuned the banjo strings, and carried her wraps for her with the most patient assiduity? It is true she did casually mention his going, and expressed to us the hope that, whatever might be the cause, we should find him returning to the Nameless Barge later on in our wanderings. But she was plainly all eagerness to be off to Warwick Castle; and she got hold of Mrs. Threepenny-bit by the arm, and dragged her down the staircase and out into the open thoroughfare with an ostentation of affectionate companionship which was perhaps just a little bit uncalled-for. For, after all, they didn't know their way; and it served them right that they had to pull up and ask. One did not wish to triumph over them, of course—although Miss Peggy's glance of defiant malice had a sort of challenge in it—but still it was pointed out to them that the formation of secret societies was a futile thing as amongst women, *and that they* would do much better not to profess a mystery *that didn't, and* couldn't (by reason of their tongues), exist.

We found Jack Duncombe at the gateway, but before going in he begged the women-folk (for he still kept up the pretence of being their escort, despite his pre-occupied looks and his imminent departure), he begged them to accompany him a little way down Mill-street, where he assured them they would get a very striking view of the castle. Striking, indeed, it was; it almost looked as if it had been designed by a drawing-master: the great grey frontage, with Cæsar's Tower and Guy's Tower, rising into the pale blue and white of the summer sky; and all around the base of the mighty walls a kind of fringe of picturesqueness—the yellow waters of the Avon flowing between rich green meadows, a broken bridge whose buttresses were smothered in masses of ivy, a dilapidated mill-wheel and some tumble-down old cottages of brick and timber. But one has observed before that it is rarely the picturesqueness of a place that attracts Miss Peggy; it is rather the human interest of it; and as we are walking back to the main entrance she says to the person who happens to be her companion for the time being—

"I suppose, now, you think I ought to be struck by the great age of a castle that was founded by a daughter of Alfred the Great. Well, it is quite the opposite. These things seem to bring far-back centuries quite close up; and you begin to imagine that the time has not been so long, and long, and long, as it always appeared to be. I remember I used to think of everything you read about in the New Testament as having happened ages and ages ago—as being quite separated and away from us—it all seemed to have no kind of connection with the actual existing world: well, you come and see a place like this, standing before you, and you are told that King Alfred's daughter began to build the fortress in 900 and something—why, that's almost half-way back—half-way back to all that took place by the side of the Lake of Galilee. That seems very strange, somehow."

Her speech was rather incoherent; but one could make out some glimmering of what she meant. And it was also interesting to notice how, inside the castle—in those magnificent halls stored

with costly treasures gathered from all parts of the world—she turned with comparative indifference from buhl and ormolu, from marqueterie tables and Indian bowls and Etruscan vases, to pay curious attention to the portraits. She would stand riveted before this one or that—Mary Queen of Scots, it might be, or Anne Boleyn, or the Marquis of Montrose, or Charles I. —apparently striving to read into their features something of what she knew of their story. But, of course, she was greatly charmed by the situation of Lady Warwick's boudoir—with its windows overlooking the magnificent trees and the winding valley of the Avon; and here it was that Queen Tita came forward and took the girl by the hand and led her out on to a small stone balcony.

"Here is a view for you, Peggy," she said. "And, do you know, I am certain this was the kind of snug corner that Lady Mary Anne had all to herself, where she could look down on the young fellows playing at the ball. I suppose you don't know the old ballad?—

> O Lady Mary Anne looked owre the castle wa'.
> She saw three bonnie boys playing at the ba',
> And the youngest among them was the flower o' them a';
> My bonny laddie's young, but he's growing yet.

I think she must have been an audacious young lady—do you know what she said?—

> 'O father, O father, an' ye think it fit,
> We'll send him a year to the college yet;
> We'll sew a green ribbon round about his hat,
> And that will let them ken he's to marry yet.'

But she was young herself—so says the ballad—

> Lady Mary Anne was a flower in the dew,
> Sweet was its smell and bonnie was its hue,
> And the langer it blossomed, the sweeter it grew;
> For the lily in the bud will be bonnier yet."

"And were they married when he came back from college?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Oh, I suppose so. But the ballad-maker doesn't wait to *tell; it was the* figure of the Lady Mary Anne in the balcony

that took his fancy. And surely it must have been just such another balcony as this—opening from her own boudoir ——"

"Who was she?" asks Miss Peggy again.

"I'm sure I don't know. Perhaps she never existed. Perhaps she was nothing but a dream—a fancy of some rustic poet."

"Oh, no; it is better to think she was a real person—I don't care about dreams," says Miss Peggy; and therewith she comes in from the balcony—she and her friend—and they resume their slow perambulation of the splendid halls.

When we got back to our hotel—after having rummaged through one or two bric-à-brac shops, that are well known to lovers of useless furniture and cracked plates—we found a telegram lying on the table addressed to our young playwright. He took it up and open the envelope.

"Yes," he said, "it is as I feared. I must go back to town to-morrow."

"So soon as that?" said Queen Tita; and—despite the fact that her small brain was busy with thoughts of the coming of Colonel Cameron—she managed to put a little decent regret into the words.

"Yes," he said, "it is rather a nuisance. You know, you have all been so kind as to let me engineer this trip in a sort of a way, and I should like to have seen it through. However, I don't think you will have any trouble now. There will be those long tunnels, of course; but Columbus should be able to get you through without difficulty. And in going down the Severn you will choose a smooth day, naturally ——"

"Oh, but don't look at your going from that point of view only," remonstrates Queen Tita, in a very kindly way (considering what he had said about Prince Charlie). "I have no doubt we shall get on well enough. But we had hoped you would be with us all the way along; it seems such a pity your having to break off in the middle."

"Yes, I don't much like it," said he—and surely, if any falling out with Miss Rosslyn had prompted his going, he was now acting indifference very well indeed. "You will be coming to the best of it soon. I should like to have passed a night or

two in the Forest of Arden, in that vagabond way—and then going down the Severn—and the Kennet and Avon ——"

Now here Miss Peggy thought fit to strike in. Perhaps her heart (if any) smote her a little. He had done his best to amuse her during all this time; he had let her into his literary confidences; had produced aphorisms for her; had (alas!) revealed to her his dramatic ambitions, and had told her the names of our English wild-flowers so far as he knew them, which was not very far. And so she says, as she is pouring out a cup of tea for him—

"But can't you come back later on, Mr. Duncombe? Why, it will be quite different without you. We shall feel quite lost and lonely."

"It is very good of you to say so," he makes answer (and, if he is offended with the young lady, he certainly conceals it admirably). "As for the coming back, the case stands thus. You ought to fill up my place—and you should have little difficulty if your friends knew what this way of travelling was like—I say you ought to fill up my place, for it is better to have an additional hand to take the tiller at times. Well, then, you see, even if I should come back later on, I should find my berth occupied ——"

"But, look here, Mr. Duncombe," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who, on the assumption that her Highlander friend will soon be with us, can afford to be a trifle generous, "if that were so, couldn't you manage somehow? I never knew any difficulty about making room for an extra person on board a yacht; and if a clumsy, unwieldy thing like this can't be hospitable, I wonder what it is good for."

"If it came to that," said he, "I could be with you during the day, and go off for lodgings at night, like Captain Columbus. He has never failed yet to find some kind of a place, although Miss Rosslyn thinks that England is an uninhabited country. And I should certainly like to go down the Severn with you. I want to see how a house-boat will answer. In fact, I consider myself in a way responsible for your safety; and I don't want *to hear of your* getting into trouble ——"

"But do you think there will be any danger?" she said quickly—a question which, to do the small person justice, you would never have heard her put on board any yacht.

"I should say not," he answered. "There is sometimes a bit of sea on in the estuary of the Severn; but she ought to ride out anything; and then of course you would keep all the doors and windows shut so that the wind couldn't get a purchase on her."

"For we mustn't drown Peggy in the Bristol Channel," she remarked.

"I would never speak to you again if you did," that young lady observed in reply.

Towards nine o'clock that evening, an open landau stood in front of the Warwick Arms; and presently two cloaked and hooded creatures, accompanied by a couple of shawl-bearers, came out of the hotel and took their seats in the carriage. The thoroughfare was almost deserted on this still moonlight night; hardly any passer-by was visible along the wan grey pavements; though on the shadowed side of the street here and there a window shone a dull orange through the dark.

"I am almost afraid—I hope nothing will happen," said a girl's voice, in rather low tones.

"Why, what should happen?" her companion asked.

"Surely, if there are phantoms anywhere, it will be at Kenilworth Castle. Amy Robsart wasn't the only one Leicester murdered, was she?"

"Fancy Peggy being afraid of ghosts!" said the other—as the horses were sent forward, and there was a sharp rattle of hoofs and wheels in the silent street. "Why, Peggy, I thought you called them 'spooks' in your country. Well, you know, you couldn't be afraid of anything called a 'spook'."

Presently we had left the last of the houses behind, and were out in the open country, where the moonlight was throwing black shadows from the elm trees across the wide white road. There was not a sound anywhere; nor a breath of wind to stir the great overhanging branches. The wooded and undulating landscape, touched here and there into a pallid grey,

lay silent under the stars; we could not even hear the barking of a dog, telling of some distant farm It was a strangely still world we were driving through, and we ourselves were not disposed to be over-garrulous.

At length we came to Guy's Cliff; but from the road, of course, there was nothing visible but a long and wide avenue of trees, with a modern-looking building—in dusky shadow—at the end of it. There was nothing here to tell of the warrior who had repented him of the slaughter he had wrought in honour of his lady-love, who came home and turned hermit, and who was tended in his holy retirement by the lady herself, who did not recognise him, fancying that her lord had died in Palestine. But Miss Peggy knew of the legend; and this at least was the neighbourhood in which the repentant Knight dug out a cell for himself in the solid rock, and lived and died in great sanctity. Then again, on the other side of the road, up among some trees on the hill-side, we could just make out a small grey object; and we guessed that to be the monument which marks the spot where Piers Gaveston, "the minion of a hateful King," was beheaded some five centuries and a half ago. But the aim of our quest lay further on. And still, as we pursued our way through this silent landscape, the over-arching sky remained serene and clear; all the circumstances were propitious for our visit; Miss Peggy was to see Kenilworth "aright".

And yet she could not have been in the least prepared for the startling beauty of the vision that suddenly declared itself before us as we swept round a turn of the road. We had driven through a long and straggling village that appeared to be fast asleep—a quite interminable string of houses and cottages it seemed—and had thereafter got into the country again, where our view was hemmed in by dark masses of foliage along the roadside. We had no knowledge of the neighbourhood, nor of the whereabouts of the Castle; and it was quite unexpectedly that, through an opening in the trees, we beheld a vast mass of walls and towers, silver-grey in the moonlight, and here and there blackened with ivy, and all clearly defined *against the cloudless* heavens. The vision lasted for but a

second. The spectral castle in the moonlight disappeared. The next minute we found ourselves in a hollow, with the horses splashing through a ford; then they slowly ascended a bit of a hill on the other side; finally, we pulled up at a gateway, and all got down.

Our coming had been expected, and there was no difficulty about obtaining entrance. But it was with no great speed that this silent little party made its way through the garden, which was filling all the night-air with its varied scents. You would have fancied the women were walking on tip-toe; not a word was said. And then again, when they left the garden-path, and emerged upon the wide plateau round which are ranged the giant walls and towers and galleries, they seemed to hesitate. Was it not a kind of sacrilege to go forward?—the place seemed so still in this white light—so still as to be almost awful. Not a leaf stirred in the heavy masses of ivy that hung around the mullioned windows; no bat came flitting out from the mysterious corridors; no raven croaked from those mighty towers whose summits were with the stars. A phantom castle indeed; for the moonlight had robbed the ruddy stone of its colour, and it was now of a pale and silvery grey; and grey, too, was the sky that shone clear through broken archway and lofty loop-hole. The two women stood voiceless—themselves like ghosts—though their shadows fell sharp and black on the grass. And then Miss Peggy, almost in a whisper, asked if we knew which of these was Mervyn's Tower; and we knew why she asked; it was in a chamber somewhere within the great mass of masonry now in front of her that the Countess Amy had sought shelter, a trembling fugitive and captive, writing a letter to her faithless lord, and tying it with a love-knot of her hair, while he was entertaining the proud Queen of England with masque, and pageant, and ball.

But of course considerations of mere sentiment could not be allowed to interfere with our affording our young American friend all the information and instruction in our power; and it was necessary—notwithstanding the impressive silence of the place, and the ineffable beauty that the moonlight threw over

those imposing ruins—that she should begin and try to construct for herself some idea of the Castle as it was when Queen Elizabeth and all her courtiers and retainers were assembled to hold high revel within its walls. Jack Duncombe had brought a plan with him; and the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments would have shuddered at the audacity with which he set about the work of restoration, not only connecting walls and completing towers, but decorating the Pleasance with statues and fountains and grottoes, and furnishing the Great Hall with oaken roof, and tapestries, and brazen chandeliers, and waxen torches. The younger of the two women listened; but she looked more than she listened. It was plain that a certain eerie feeling still hung over both of them; and when they were bidden to ascend a certain part of the building, and enter a chamber there from which they could see the moonlit landscape all around, they seemed to regard with a kind of suspicion, if not with actual dread, the long black galleries which were so strangely silent.

"I suppose you never saw Millais's 'Grey Lady'?" Queen Tita said to her companion. "No? It is two or three years since it was exhibited, and I don't know where it is now. But I thought it was very fine—though the critics didn't seem to care much for it ——"

"The critics!" said Jack Duncombe (of course).

"It was the figure of a lady—grey and ethereal and ghostly —and with vague and absent eyes—and she was making her way up a turret-stair, with her hand outstretched before her. The curious thing was that her hand and part of her arm caught the moonlight—and yet they were quite visionary too—while the rest of her was in a kind of shadow. Peggy, if you were to see anyone coming along there—now ——"

They were regarding, like two frightened children, a narrow and dusky corridor, into which, at some distance away, fell a solitary ray of moonlight.

"No," said Peggy; "the place is too silent and dead and *empty* for even a ghost. But I don't think I should like to *wander through* these ruins by myself at night."

And yet, after all our imaginary reconstruction was over, she seemed loth to leave. She was the last to linger there, in the open plateau, looking up at the grey moonlit walls and the empty windows, the ivied towers, and the serene and silent stars. Nay, when we were all coming away by the garden-path, she left us, and went back, and stood there alone for a minute or two. When she returned she said—

"I wonder, now, when I am at home again in America, and when I think of this night, I wonder whether I shall be able to persuade myself that I ever did actually see anything so wonderful and beautiful? I am afraid it will seem all like a dream. I went back to have another look just now; I suppose I shall be able to remember something like it—something a little like it—but it will be all dream-like and unreal. It will appear to be a castle built of air—as unsubstantial as the Grey Lady you were speaking of."

This possibility seemed to concern her not a little—or perhaps she was merely trying to impress on her memory the chief features of the scene she had just witnessed; at all events, she was very silent during the long drive back to Warwick, and paid hardly any heed to what little conversation was going on.

Now, this was to be the last night that our little party, as hitherto constituted, was to assemble together; and at the modest banquet that was meant to console us for our lack of dinner, the two womenfolk—no doubt looking back over the lengthened companionship now drawing to a close, and bethinking them of Jack Duncombe's helpfulness and friendliness and general good-humour—were unmistakably inclined to be complaisant to the young man. Whether his hostess had really forgiven him for his scandalous schemes in connection with the Young Chevalier, or whether she was confidently looking forward to an ally who would keep Miss Peggy's sympathies on the right side, one, of course, could not say; but, in any case, she was very kind to him, and not only renewed her expressions of regret at his going, but once more urged his return when that might be practicable for him.

"Oh, I shall be glad enough to get back if I can," said he

—which he hardly would have said had he been going away in resentment of Miss Peggy's conduct; and now he was affecting to be more cheerful, though he was not in a very gay mood, we could see. "And, as I say, I think you are all right now for the rest of the expedition. Of course there was always a risk—the experiment never having been tried before; and once or twice I thought we should be stuck; but I think everything should go smoothly now. If you had to begin all over again, of course, you would have the boat six inches narrower in beam, and six inches lower in the roof, so that you would have no trouble with the bridges: that's all that I can see in the way of improvement. I consider the whole thing to have been most successful so far ——"

"And you know yourself how much of that we owe to you," Mrs. Threepenny-bit made bold to say. "Think of the Thames, even—we should never have got on at all."

"Oh! I had to learn like other people," said he, modestly. "I never had anything to do with a boat like this before. But I think it was a capital idea, to begin with; and I think it has turned out very well. The thing that strikes me most about it is the curious sense of independence you have—you are not tied to any inn or town—you stop just where you like—and you take your own house with you all the time."

"Some people would find it rather slow," she suggested.

"Some people would find it quite intolerable," said he. "But you remember what Mr. Ruskin says: 'To any person who has all his senses about him travelling becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity. Going by railroad I do not consider travelling at all; it is merely being sent to a place, and very little different from becoming a parcel.' And then you have to consider that if this trip has so far been pleasant enough in spite of the broken weather, you can imagine what it would be in settled fine weather."

"Oh! I don't think the weather matters much," observed Miss Peggy, blithely. "You can always pop indoors to escape *a shower: it isn't* like driving in rain. No; what strikes me as *the most curious* thing is the way the time passes—the extra-

ordinary number of things you get to do. You gentlemen seem to be hard at work from morning till night; while for us—well, I suppose, I shall get my novel carried on a bit further some day or other, but I don't know when. And I can't get letters written at all. I know some people who will think I have got lost in the woods—wandered in the trackless prairies of the middle of England—and never coming back to civilised life any more. That's another thing: when are the adventures to begin?"

"What adventures?"

"Why, we must have wild adventures; we must be attacked by robbers; and have to barricade the doors and fire through the windows. Why shouldn't there be pirates on a canal, and desperate villains and bloody deeds? Oh! I can tell you I saw something yesterday morning that would have startled you. It was before any of you were up—or out, at least. There was a solitary barge coming along; and as it was passing, I saw there was a tuft of hair hanging from the top of the rudder. Well, anything more horribly like a scalp it was impossible to imagine—it was long hair, too, like a woman's. And there was I all alone, mind you; I might have been another victim; the cowardly dogs of Mingoes might have sprung upon me, and bound me hand and foot—think of that for an adventure: the Scalp-Hunters of the Wild Canal! ——"

"But what was the tuft of hair, Peggy?" her hostess interrupts.

"Oh! well," Miss Peggy says lightly, "Captain Columbus told me afterwards. It was an emblem of affection, not of bloodthirstiness. It was a memorial of an old friend and companion gone to his rest. It was part of the tail of a horse. But that's neither here nor there," she adds; "what I say is, we must have some wild and perilous adventures ——"

"I hope it won't be as you are going down the Severn," remarks the young man, significantly.

"There, again, now," cries Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "I do really believe you think we shall be in danger going down the Severn. What will the boat do, Mr. Duncombe? Is it pos-

sible for her to roll over, if there are heavy waves? Or could she be blown over? For I won't have Peggy run any risk. She's under my care. She's not worth much; but I have charge of her."

"No, I don't think there will be any great danger," he says again, to reassure them. "In any case, you can all go on board the tug; and if the house-boat sinks, there will be nobody drowned but the one who is steering—and that will be Murdoch."

"I will not have Murdoch drowned for all the house-boats that ever were built!" exclaimed Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Can't the wretched old thing steer herself?"

"No, that kind of craft hasn't been invented yet. But I think she will keep afloat. Of course you won't all be sitting on the roof—by-the-way, you have never tried that way of sailing through the country."

"The weather never gave us a chance!" she says. "But there is a wonderful change coming. There are golden days in store for us, Peggy; and you and I will have cushions and rugs laid along the top, and we will sit and sew, or read, or you will play the banjo, and we shall be as gods together ——"

"Until lunch-time arrives," one remarks.

"We shall have lunch on the top, too."

"Well, don't try it as you are going down the Severn, especially if there is a brisk breeze coming up against the stream," Mr. Jack Duncombe observes, by way of final warning. "For there is next to nothing to hold on by—that rail has got all smashed with getting under the bridges. Then the channel of the river twists; and if at a corner the wind were to catch her and tilt her over a bit, your sliding off into the water would not only be unpleasant—it would be very ignominious."

"Can't we have a small dinghy astern, if that caravansary is likely to go to the bottom?" she demands.

"Yes," he answers, "that would be simple enough; and *then if* Murdoch found the boat filling—I don't see why she *should myself,* but such things have happened—if he found her

threatening to sink, he would jump into the dinghy, cut the painter, and be all right."

"At all events, Mr. Duncombe," she says to him (and she can be very gracious when she pleases—that is, when everything is going as she wants it to go)—"at all events, we shall hope to find you with us there, to have the benefit of your advice. I am sure we can't say how indebted we are to you for your help in getting us along as far as we have got."

Soon thereafter—for it had been a long and busy day—there was a general departure for our respective quarters; and the Warwick Arms subsided into the general silence that lay over the sleeping town. And if Miss Peggy dreamed dreams and saw visions that night—and if any fragments of melody, suggested by what she had seen at Kenilworth, were haunting her brain, it is as likely as not that these were the familiar lines—

> "The dews of summer night did fall,
> The moon, sweet regent of the sky,
> Silvered the walls of Cumnor Hall,
> And many an oak that grew thereby".

But perhaps it was just as well that she had not encountered the ghost of poor Amy Robsart.

CHAPTER XIII.

'Fill the bowl with rosy wine!
Around our temples roses twine!
And let us cheerfully a while,
Like the wine and roses, smile.
Crowned with roses we contemn
Gyges' wealthy diadem.
To-day is ours, what do we fear?
To-day is ours, we have it here;
Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish, at least, with us to stay.
Let's banish business, banish sorrow:
To the gods belongs to-morrow."

HERE, in the coffee-room of the Shakespeare Hotel, Stratford-on-Avon, on this May morning, one is reluctantly compelled to chide the nervous impatience of a certain young person, apparently caused by nothing more than Queen Tita's delay in coming down.

"What would you be at? Do you want to take Stratford at a rush?—do you think you are Ewen Cameron at Tel-el-Kebir? Do you want to join the ranks of the impenitent tourist? Why don't you go over to the sofa there, and sit down, and drum your toes on the carpet, and strum your fingers on the window-pane, and try to get rid of a little of that superfluous trans-Atlantic electricity? A pretty frame of mind for one who ought rather to be thinking about the secret of the Warwickshire Avon, and wondering whether you will ever discover it."

"Don't be hard on a fellow," she says, good-naturedly, and she goes and sits down on the sofa, and clasps her hands in *front of her.* "Well, now, what is the secret of the Warwick*shire Avon?*"

"It is something that can't be explained to you—though you may find it out for yourself in time. Of course there are conditions. You would have to calm down your temperament a little. It isn't everyone who can hear the grass growing—just at once; you have to wait and listen, and wait and listen; and if there is any place for hearing the grass grow, it is in the Warwickshire meadows and along the Warwickshire streams. Then you've got to leave comparisons behind; and you've got to forget chromo-lithographs; and you have to prepare yourself for a little disappointment, even perhaps for a little dejection and vague melancholy; then, by-and-by you grow reconciled; and then, slowly and gradually, you begin to feel the charm there is in the old-world repose and gentleness and quiet of the landscape, and in the placid nature of the people, and in the silence of the monotonous but perfectly cheerful and even days. If you were to live in a Warwickshire village for six months, Miss Peggy, you would get to see what worlds of space and time lie between the innocent gaiety of Herrick and the unceasing self-consciousness of Thoreau. But where would you be at the end of the six months?"

"In the village, I suppose."

"In your grave, more likely. But you would have learnt something. The fact is, if Rasselas had been born in this Happy Valley, it isn't that he never would have left it—he never would have understood how anyone could want to leave it. In a minute or two, when we go out, I will show you long, straggling, old-fashioned thoroughfares in which nearly every second house is a small tavern—a tavern that does no trade. Generally the door is shut. If you went inside, you would find no one in the bar; but by-and-by a smiling and buxom little landlady might make her appearance, and if you asked for a glass of ale, she would cheerfully accede, and expect you to enter into a conversation with her about things in general. In the evening, of course, you might find a few friends of the house occupying the parlour, with long clay pipes, and pewter pots, and some slow and measured talk about the crops, the markets, and so forth—safe remarks, warranted to stir up no

argument. But in the day-time these little inns never think of doing any business ——"

"How do the people live, then?"

"They live as their neighbours live—by not taking any trouble about it. They live as the grass grows. Why should they take any trouble? Why should they think of leaving the Happy Valley? They live as their fathers lived, and as their grandfathers and grandmothers lived, and they grow old contentedly in the same way. As long as there is a good fat side of bacon hanging from the kitchen rafter, why should they trouble about to-morrow, or next day, or next week? It is to-day they live in; and they are sufficiently happy in the present moment.

"But the bacon has to be paid for," says this practical young person.

"The bacon may have come from a farmer, most likely, who got a barrel of ale in exchange."

"Then the ale has to be paid for."

The insatiable character of the American mind!

"I tell you that they don't trouble about such things. Come and see them. Talk to them. Judge for yourself if you ever met happier people—though they don't seem to do any trade."

"Oh, well, I don't care anything about them," she says, impertinently. "There is only one tavern in Stratford that I care about—that is the one that Shakespeare used to frequent —where he played shovel-board with his friend the landlord— Julius Shawe, wasn't it? And I've seen it—at least the outside of it—I noticed the sign as we drove up to the hotel; I recognised it at once."

There is a pause of a second or two.

"What are you staring at?" she says.

"I am admiring your calmness. You can sit there and say things of that kind—and have no fear of the heavens falling on you!"

"What do you mean? It isn't possible that you never noticed the Falcon Tavern?—you've been in Stratford before."

"*The Falcon* Tavern! Why, every amateur magazinist *who sets about* reconstructing Shakespeare's Stratford is sure to

start away with the Falcon Tavern in the High-street, opposite New Place; whereas New Place isn't in the High-street and never was; and the house opposite wasn't a tavern at all in Shakespeare's time, nor for many a long year thereafter. But that's nothing. That is a common and vulgar error. You have gone far further and deeper and wilder than that ——"

"It's all very well to talk," she says, in an injured tone, and she takes up a little green volume; "but just you look at this woodcut. It is a drawing of New Place, and here is the Falcon Inn opposite, sign and all ——"

"Oh, pitch that wretched book out of the window! Do you want to be told that Judith Shakespeare married one Thomas Quincey, and also that she became Mrs. Hall and left one daughter who was afterwards Lady Barnard? Is that the kind of information you are pouring into your innocent young mind? As for that drawing, it is only part and parcel of Samuel Ireland's ridiculous inventions; but where did you get the rest of that nonsense—about the shovel-board and Julius Shawe the landlord and all that? Not in that book, bad as it is."

"So there was no Falcon Tavern in Shakespeare's time?" she says, absently, and in rather a disappointed way.

"But there was a house there, opposite New Place," one says to her (for it is a pity to rob her of all her illusions), "and a very interesting old house it is now; and if you are good, we'll take you to see it presently. And you may imagine, if you like, that some of the furniture may have come across from New Place, as alterations were made there from time to time; possibly the oak panelling, too, which is very good oak panelling indeed, though some monstrous wretch has gone and painted it all over at some time or other. Do you know that a countrywoman of yours offered to pay all the cost of having that panelling carefully scraped and restored to its original condition; and it is a great pity the offer wasn't accepted."

Here Miss Peggy holds out both her hands, straight before her.

"Look!"

"Well?"

"Am I sufficiently calm now? Do you see how steady my fingers are?"

"They don't tremble much."

"And yet this is my first visit to Stratford-on-Avon—my first visit—and I am an American girl: oh, you don't understand!"

Perhaps one did understand, easily enough. However, at this moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit made her appearance, all bonneted and shawled and ready to set forth; Miss Peggy, with much alacrity, picked up her sunshade; and presently we had passed through the shadowed corridor and out from under the pillared portico into the white air of Stratford town.

And as we leisurely walked along this main thoroughfare, our young American friend spoke not one word to either of her companions; but from the curiously-excited interest with which she regarded every object she could fix her eyes on, you might have sworn she had it in her imagination that this dawdling butcher's boy and that patient, plodding old woman, with the silvery hair and the Normandy-pippin cheeks, were somehow related to Shakespeare—the lineal descendants of his neighbours and associates; and that he himself had walked along this identical grey pavement. On this occasion we allowed her but a glimpse of New Place and a glance at the outside of the Falcon Inn; we wanted to give her some notion of the country around Stratford; so we took her along Scholar's Lane, making for the meadows that lie between the town and the hamlet of Shottery.

The day was just fitted for the placid Warwickshire landscape into which we wandered outside the suburban gardens. There had been some rain during the night, or perhaps early in the morning; but now the skies were fair, if not completely clear; long streaks of turquoise blue lay between the motionless, soft, fleecy, white clouds; and a dull, sultry sunlight lay on the moist green meadows, on the hawthorn hedges, on the great wide-branching elms, not a leaf of which was stirring. A deathlike silence brooded over this wide extent of country, that rose at the horizon into a line of low-lying hill serrated with woods; but somewhere, far away, there was a tinkling of

a bell—probably a school-bell; and around us there was a continuous twittering of birds busy after the rain. There was no other sign of life. And in this perfect stillness and solitariness one grew to fancy that, however Stratford town may have been altered in its old-world streets and houses, these meadows must have been in Shakespeare's time, and long before that, too, very much what they are now, with buttercups among the lush grass, in the sweet May-time, under the fleecy white skies. Miss Peggy was most anxious to be satisfied on that point. This was the very way, then, that Shakespeare would come if he were going over to Shottery? He must have crossed this little brook? And seen those hills away down there in the south? It must have been as lonely then as it is now? And a place of meditation as one walked?

Presently she had strayed from the pathway a short distance, and was engaged in gathering buttercups and daisies. When she returned with a considerable handful, she said—

"They say we Americans go through Europe chipping and cutting everywhere to take back souvenirs. But I don't think we do that now: we have got shamed out of it. Anyway, no one would grudge me these?"

"It is a very simple bouquet, Peggy," Mrs. Threepenny-bit says; "I think we could find you something better than that."

"Better than that?" she answers at once. "I don't know where, then. If you only knew the value that will be put upon them when I send them home. They will have to do for a good many people, too; but all I shall have to say will be: 'Dear So-and-so, I send you two or three wild-flowers that I gathered this morning in Shakespeare's fields'. Do you think it will matter to them what kind of flowers they are? Ah, if you only knew! I suppose, now, you would think it awfully silly if a girl were to cry when she got these daisies sent to her in America—I mean, a girl who isn't likely ever to be in England herself—and who knows all about Stratford—but has never seen any actual thing belonging to it. You would think it silly, wouldn't you? For you English are so dreadfully stolid. You don't seem to care about anything. Your great men are

all thrown away on you; you don't take the trouble to honour them; you are quite indifferent. I do believe you think more of the man who invented Harvey's sauce than of any poet who ever lived in your country. Why, I have hardly met anybody in England who has been to Stoke Poges; and I never heard of an American who came to see England who didn't go there. You, now," she says, addressing a perfectly inoffensive bystander, "have you ever been to Stoke Poges?"

"No."

"There!" she says, triumphantly.

"But you may admire a man's work, and honour his memory, without making pilgrimages to his grave."

"It is because you won't take the trouble. Or, perhaps, it isn't consistent with English pride to show anything like gratitude? I suppose, instead of showing gratitude, you would rather sit down and pull all that he had done to bits, and declare that the mass of mankind were quite mistaken in thinking there was anything fine in it at all?"

"Ah, well, Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, getting hold of the girl's arm and taking her on with her, "isn't it a comfort that sometimes we have a stranger come among us to give us a good scolding?"

"Yes; but she might be a little more accurate," says one of us (who likes to be crushed no more than any other human being). "If it comes to that, Harvey's sauce wasn't invented by a man, but by a woman: sauce of any kind comes more natural to a woman. And as for those bits of weeds that you are sending to America as having been gathered in Shakespeare's fields—how do you know that they were the meadows that belonged to Shakespeare?"

She turns her head for a second.

"They belong to him now—and so does the whole place: I don't care what English landlord thinks he owns them," she says, proudly; and of course that settles the question; there is no more to be said; it is quite right that an impertinent American school-girl should come over here to teach us the *whole duty of man.*

But you should have observed how she changed her tune as we drew near Shottery. She had vaguely heard of doubts having been thrown on the tradition connecting Anne Hathaway's name with the well-known cottage; and she was anxious to be assured that all the thousands and thousands of people, many of them famous, others hardly so famous, who had made their pilgrimage to the spot had not been labouring under a delusion. It was quite certain, was it, that the name given in "William Shagspere's" marriage-bond was "Anne Hathwey"? And it was known that there were Hathaways living in Shottery? And the belief that Anne Hathaway lived in this particular cottage went very far back, did it not? And so forth. Then she says—

"And is it possible that Shakespeare's widow married again after his death?"

"So you have heard about that, have you? Well, it was a countryman of yours, and a friend of mine, who threw that pretty little bomb-shell into the air, and then ran away to Australia before it burst. Is it possible? Everything is possible. But considering that she was an old woman of sixty when Shakespeare died, and that she herself died seven years afterwards, and that on her tombstone she is described as 'Anne, wife of Mr. William Shakespeare,' I don't think it very probable. Well, now, haven't you got any more questions? Don't you want to know whether it is reasonably likely that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays?"

"Well, now, is there anything in that theory?" she asks, with much innocence.

"Oh, I'm not going to give any opinion. I'm not going to prejudice your mind, if you have any notion of becoming a convert to the new religion. But I fancy that if the ghost of Ben Jonson could hear it suggested that his old chum and boon companion was nothing but a rank impostor—if Ben Jonson could hear of that suggestion—and also be permitted the use of pen, ink, and paper between now and dinner-time—I imagine there would come a message from the other world that would considerably startle some folk."

And there was no more impertinence, there was rather a

humble submission, and a tremulous eagerness of interest, shown by Miss Peggy, as we went down and through the scattered little hamlet that was almost smothered amid the luxuriant leafage of the Spring. Very picturesque indeed were the small cottages on this fresh May morning; the orchards were gay with apple-blossom, and the gardens with lilacs both purple and white; while the warm air around us was fragrant with sweet-brier, and also at times with the soft-smelling hawthorn. This was our first meeting with the hawthorn; not a bit of May had we seen all the way along; no doubt the shelter of the little hollow and the moist warm winds combined had brought the blossom out somewhat before its usual time.

The old dame at the cottage made a great pet of Miss Peggy; and when she discovered that the tall young stranger hailed from across the Atlantic she pointed out in the visitors' book the signatures of one or two distinguished Americans whom she thought the young lady might know. And when we were coming away, she declared that the little posy Miss Peggy was carrying would never do at all. Oh, no, she must take away with her—if she was going back to America—something a little better than that: wouldn't she wait for a moment until she could have a few flowers gathered for her from the garden? And very soon the good old dame had culled a very pretty little nosegay of common cottage-flowers—columbine, forget-me-not, wall-flower, and the like; and she gave them to Miss Peggy with a favouring smile. Only cottage flowers they were; but we who were standing by had a kind of notion that the young American lady would not have exchanged that little bouquet for all the hot-house flowers in Covent-garden multiplied a hundred times over.

Then we wandered on through the straggling small hamlet half-hidden amongst its gardens and orchards, and eventually made our way out on to the Alcester-road, and so back to Stratford town. We were just entering the High-street when whom should we espy in the distance but our faithful Captain Columbus, serenely sauntering along the pavement and looking at the shop-windows. And naturally we congratulated ourselves on having a skipper so prompt and alert, and were glad to

think that now, at any moment we chose, we could resume our voyage, having the Nameless Barge close by, awaiting us in some convenient creek.

"Good morning, Captain! You haven't been long in getting her through. Whereabouts in Stratford is the canal-basin?"

"Beg pardon, Sir, but she isn't in Stratford yet," says he, rather solemnly; and in an instant the dreadful fear flashes upon us that our noble vessel has been run into in mid-Atlantic—in mid-canal, that is—and irrevocably sunk.

"Where is she, then?"

"Well, Sir, as near as I could judge, about three miles from Claverdon: that was the first station on the line I came to, across country. Very sorry, Sir, but she's stuck fast there: there's a bridge I can't get her through anyhow."

"There!—the moment Mr. Duncombe leaves us we get into trouble!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with an audacity which even she has rarely equalled; for who was so willing that Jack Duncombe should go, in order that she might provide a place for her lamp-post of a Highlander?

"There's only the one way, Sir," continues our indomitable Columbus. "The canal people say they will draw off the water so as we can get the boat through; but they want to be paid for that."

Aha!—so there was a solution, after all? And how could we do better than take a lesson from the great and wise of our own land? Now-a-days, when an English Minister is confronted by a difficulty—foreign or domestic—his first and immediate thought is, "Very well, then; what size of a cheque is necessary to settle this job?" That is modern English statesmanship; and sometimes he pays away money so freely that the people who get it are at their wits' end to know what to do with it. And why should we not, in our small and humble way, profit by such an example? We were in a difficulty; we were asked to pay; and what was the use of arguing or fighting?

"How much will they take, Captain?"

"A matter of a few shillings, Sir, I should think, would get it done."

"Go you away back to Claverdon, then, and pay what they ask, and bring that boat along as fast as ever you can. For the rain has taken it into its head to stop; and we want to get some part of the voyage done in decent weather."

"Very well, Sir," said our Captain, and we left him to make his way onward to the station.

The moment we entered our little sitting-room at the hotel, Queen Tita cast a hasty glance towards the mantelpiece; there was nothing for her there.

"Isn't it strange Colonel Cameron hasn't telegraphed?" she said. "He must have had both my telegram and letter by now."

"Oh, well, I am not sorry," Miss Peggy made answer, ingenuously. "Wouldn't it be delicious to be away entirely by ourselves—in the woods—in the Forest of Arden?—and we start to-morrow, don't we, if Captain Columbus can bring the boat along? In any case, couldn't we go to Claverdon, and walk across? I do hope you won't wait for anybody. I think it would be splendid to be entirely by ourselves."

"Why, Peggy," says her hostess, as she draws a chair in to the table, where luncheon is already laid, "didn't you feel how lop-sided we were this morning? We want a fourth to complete the party. And what would you do if you hadn't somebody to practise on ——?"

"Now, now, now," Miss Peggy interposes. "You have lost the right to say anything of the kind about me. If you were honest, you would confess that I have behaved most beautifully all the way along. Now confess. Confess that I've cheated you. I know what you expected—oh, yes; I know quite well. And perhaps I have even disappointed you, in giving you no chance of scolding; but, any way, confess you have been quite mistaken."

"Oh, but I am not so sure about that," Mrs. Threepenny-bit says coolly, as she puts aside her gloves and sits down. "I am not at all so sure about that. Young women are remarkably clever in concealing what is going on. And we have had no explanation yet of Mr. Duncombe's going away. It is very *strange that he* should have nothing to put forward in the way *of excuse*—very strange indeed."

"And do you think I had anything to do with it?" the girl demands—with inscrutable eyes.

"I don't know. The whole affair is very mysterious. Before I could give you a certificate for good conduct, I should want to understand why he went away so suddenly."

"If I had anything to do with it, why should he want to come back?" says Miss Peggy, with her eyes still downcast.

"I don't know that either; but I have often seen young people make those sudden resolutions—when they were annoyed with each other—or perhaps hoping for some change of manner—trusting to the effect of absence—and regret perhaps——"

"I hope Mr. Duncombe and I parted very good friends," the young lady observes, with suspicious calmness: is she making a fool of a woman twice her age—and her hostess as well?

"I will admit this," the other continues, "that perhaps you had not sufficient time to settle him thoroughly. You were very much engaged—with English history and other things. Of course you did not know he was going. No doubt you thought you could take him up and settle him effectually when you had a little more leisure."

"I wish I had a big brother," says Miss Peggy, pensively; "he wouldn't allow people to say such things of me."

"Oh, yes, a pretty innocent you are!" the other retorts. "Now sit down at once and have some luncheon; for there is a long and busy afternoon before you."

A long and busy afternoon indeed it was; for we had to take her first of all to the house in Henley-street, in which Shakespeare was born, and introduce her to the Misses Chattaway; then we showed her over New Place; also she was allowed to inspect the rooms of the Falcon Inn; from thence we guided her steps to Stratford Church, and she passed along the noble avenue of limes, and entered the hushed building, and sought out Shakespeare's grave; finally, ere the dusk should draw over the afternoon, we led her down by the mill, and across the bridge that spans the smooth-flowing Avon,

and through the wide and flower-starred meadows that lie between the town and the hanging woods of the Weir Brake.

Now, just above those steep banks there is a corner from which a very pleasant view of Stratford and its neighbourhood may be obtained; and when these two women had climbed up through the bushes to this open space they seemed in no great hurry to leave it. A more peaceful pastoral scene one could hardly wish for. Moreover, there was now a touch of faint salmon-colour among the heavy purple clouds above our heads, and there were masses of vivid and burning gold in the western skies; so that a warmer and mellower light fell over the green foliage enfolding the town. Stratford ceased to be a show place. You could not see the Memorial Theatre. Down below us were the yellow waters of the Avon, flowing by pollard willows and grassy banks; then came the bridge and the mill; then the umbrageous elms, from which rose the distant spire of the church. There was nothing striking about this stretch of landscape; but it was peaceful; the quietude around us was gracious; the golden evening grew on apace, with hardly a sound audible anywhere. Whether Miss Peggy was trying to get at the secret of Warwickshire scenery, one could not say; but she and her friend remained there for long and long; and scarce a word was spoken between them. Nay, they lingered among the bushes on their way down (there were golden shafts of fire shooting through between the black branches) under pretence of seeking for wild hyacinths; and when, later on, in the grey twilight, they passed through the darkening meadows—like two ghosts they were as they went—they had with them some cuckoo-flowers, and speedwells, and the like. These things were for friends far away.

And again when we got back to the hotel there was neither telegram nor message of any kind awaiting us; and again Miss Peggy expressed the hope that when we once more left the haunts of men and disappeared into the Forest of Arden—or rather into the neighbourhood that used to bear the name—we should be all by ourselves. But a little later on, as we sat at dinner, a brown envelope was brought in, which Queen Tita quickly seized and broke open.

"Yes, yes," she said directly, and with much evident satisfaction, "he is coming—he expects to be with us to-morrow morning: now, Peggy, we have got a companion for you who will interest you."

Miss Peggy did not seem to look at the matter in that light. "Farewell our sylvan joys and sports!" she said, with plaintive sadness. "I had looked forward to all kinds of revels when we got into the forest—dances of fauns and satyrs by moonlight—everything that you would naturally expect in such a haunted place. I thought we might try a scene or two from 'As You Like It' some night—some misty night perhaps, when you could imagine things. But if there is to be a spectator—then it's all over."

"Why, you are like Mr. Duncombe," her hostess says. "You want to produce a play without having any critics looking on. I think you would find Colonel Cameron a very indulgent critic. What has set you against his coming, Peggy?"

"Oh! I don't know—I'm afraid of him."

"Why should you be afraid of him?"

"I can hardly tell you—except that there is something very shivery about that passage in 'Childe Harold'—you remember?"

"I should think I do remember.

> "'And wild and high the Cameron's Gathering rose,
> The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills
> Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes:
> How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills
> Savage and shrill! But with the breath which fills
> Their mountain-pipe, so fill the mountaineers
> With the fierce native daring which instils
> The stirring memory of a thousand years;
> And Evan's, Donald's fame rings in each clansman's ears!'

And you know what Walter Scott wrote, Peggy?" she continues, rather proudly.

> "'Where through battle, rout, and reel,
> Through storms of shot and hedge of steel,
> Led he, the grandson of Lochiel,
> The valiant Fassiefern.
> Through steel and shot he leads no more,
> But, Sunard rough, and wild Ardgour,
> And Morven long shall tell,

And proud Ben Nevis hear with awe,
How at the bloody Quatre Bras
Brave Cameron heard the wild hurrah
Of victory as he fell!'"

"Well, that's just it," the girl said, "I'm afraid."

"Afraid of Ewen Cameron!" was all that Mrs. Threepenny-bit answered; but there was a smile on her lips which seemed to say that she did not consider Sir Ewen Cameron to be in private life a very truculent person.

Now, whether it was that Miss Peggy was determined to have one merry evening before the coming of this overawing Colonel, or whether it was that Nature demanded a little relaxation after the high-strung excitement of the day, true it is and of verity that on this occasion—after the dinner things had been removed—she broke out into a pure madness of audacious mirth and mischief. She had only an audience of one; the third member of the party was supposed to be absorbed in nicotine and the reading of local journals (which are often quite as interesting as those which deal with large Imperial matters). But he could hear something of what was going on. Miss Peggy had got the whole of the sofa to herself. She was seated at the extreme end of it. She had the banjo on her knee. She was addressing an imaginary person at the other end of the sofa; and her imitation of the speech of a negro-minstrel was so admirable that one suspected this was not the first time she had practised it.

"Well, now, Mr. Bones," she was saying, in tones of lofty patronage, "I will ask you a question. Can you tell me when a door is not a door?"

Likewise, she answers for the imaginary minstrel—

"Can I tell you when a door is not a door?"

"Yes, Sir; can you tell me when a door is not a door? You are a clever man, Mr. Bones: you can answer my question, I presume."

"When is a door not a door?"

"Yes, Sir; that is the question I ask you. But if you do *not know, then* I will tell you. A door is not a door, Mr. *Bones, when it* is a negress."

She rises, advances a step, and gravely announces to her imaginary audience the name of the next song—"Driven from Home"; then, with a courteous bow, she returns to her seat and takes up her banjo. She does not sing very loudly (for fear of disturbing the newspaper-reader), but one can hear the simple and touching pathos she puts into the words:

"Out in the cold world, out in the street,
Asking a penny of each one I meet:
Shoeless I wander about through the day,
Wearing my young life in sorrow away.
No one to help me, no one to bless,
No one to pity me, none to caress;
Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
A child of misfortune, I'm driven from home.

Then she glances along the sofa, as if inviting a chorus, which she herself leads, but now singing alto—

"No one to help me, no one to bless,
No one to pity me, none to caress;
Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
Nursed by my poverty, driven from home".

She puts the banjo on her knee, and resumes her cheerful conversation with Mr. Bones; and really, if one forebore to peep round the corner of this newspaper, so perfect is the imagination that one might easily imagine her to be in evening dress, with a large diamond in her shirt-front, her face blackened, her lips red, her eyes rolling in doll-like fashion as she speaks, or pitifully upraised to heaven as she sings. But presently one hears the announcement, "Ladies and gentlemen, there will now be an interval of ten minutes"; and therewith, taking up her banjo, she steals out of the room.

"Have you been listening?" says Queen Tita.

"Now and again."

"Do you know that is an extraordinarily clever creature! Who would have suspected that she could do a thing like that, and do it so well? I wonder how much more cleverness she has concealed about her; and how much more madness is necessary to bring it out. For it's only when she goes daft that she reveals herself. And what is she up to now?"

No guessing was needful; there was a footstep without in the passage; one swiftly and discreetly returned to the small-beer chronicles of Warwickshire; and the door opened.

Yes, the door opened. And what was this apparition—this phantom from the Forest of Arden—this tall, swash-buckler youth, with doublet, hose, and beef-eater cap, and with a voluminous cloak of russet homespun thrown lightly around him? For an instant Rosalind stands there, with heightened colour, and laughing lips, and hesitating mien: then she enters and shuts the door, and makes her way across the room to her friend, whose head she affectionately encircles with her arm.

"'From henceforth,'" she says (but almost in a whisper, so as not to attract attention), "'I will be merry, coz, and devise sports. Let me see: what think you of falling in love?'"

"You can't do it, Peggy; it isn't in your nature."

[N.B.—This speech is not to be found in any well-known edition of "As You Like It"; and its authenticity is open to grave doubt.]

"'Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too'"

"Peggy, you will be taught a lesson some day, take my word for it!"

[This, also, is clearly a corruption of the text.]

But here Rosalind suddenly alters her manner, and takes her friend's head in both her hands for a moment, and strokes her a little.

"'But, come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition, and ask me what you will, I will grant it.'"

"You can sing me a song, Peggy, and leave my hair alone."

Then one hears a fairly expressive voice sing very quietly—

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither;
Here shall we see
No enemy ——"

But that snatch of song was never finished. There was a tapping at the door. With a smothered shriek Miss Peggy flew to the window, and hid herself behind the curtains, pretending to be looking down into the street; hardly anything could be seen of the russet-draped Ganymede behind those white folds.

"Shall I bring you some tea, Ma'am?"

"No, thank you, Minnie."

"Or for the young lady, Ma'am?"

The young lady hiding behind the curtain dares not to turn her head.

"No; I don't think you need trouble," answers Mrs. Threepenny-bit on her behalf.

"Thank you, Ma'am," says the neat handmaiden, and withdraws; and then when she is gone, one is vaguely aware that Rosalind—probably considering that another such interruption might not be so dexterously encountered—slips across the room, opens the door, and disappears into the dark passage.

"Did you see her?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I caught a glimpse of her!"

"Didn't she make a bonny boy?"

"There have been plainer youths."

"That was a costume she got for a fancy-dress ball in Brooklyn; I've never seen it before, but I've heard of it. She says she got it for its cheapness; but I'm sure it must be more like what Rosalind would wear in the forest than the dress that most stage-Rosalinds wear—Peggy's is really a disguise, whereas the stage costume would be merely an invitation to robbers. Yes, indeed, she makes a bonny boy; I don't wonder that Phœbe fell in love with her. And I'm pretty sure Peggy was thinking of some prank when she took the trouble to bring that dress with her—some nonsense in the Forest of Arden; and now that she has got a ridiculous fear of Colonel Cameron into her head, I suppose she was determined to have her piece of play-acting before he came. Well, she will have to behave henceforth; if I were to threaten to tell him of her masquerading in a room in a Stratford hotel, wouldn't that frighten her out of her wits?"

But Miss Peggy was not prepared to "behave just yet. Although she came back in her own proper clothing, she was far from being in her right mind. By rude force she possessed herself of the newspapers, and deliberately put them away; she opened the piano, and dragged Mrs. Threepenny-bit thither, and opened some music; she demanded that the table in the centre of the room should be shoved into the window-recess—in case of certain exigencies connected with one or two of the songs; and then she proceeded to get her banjo-strings in tune with the keys. What followed need not be described here—being far too chaotic to bear consecutive narrative. Indeed, it has been observed by many travellers, and reported by them in all good faith, that there is something peculiarly exhilarating—to use the mildest term—in the atmosphere of Stratford-upon-Avon; and stories are told (to which it is difficult to give credence) of the more than extraordinary conduct of which the most grave and serious-minded people, visiting that town, have been guilty. That we did not altogether escape the contagion, on this particular evening, may be frankly and freely admitted. Within just and sober bounds, there was a little modest hilarity. And, indeed, to observe Miss Peggy gently gliding round the room to a waltz-measure, singing the while the chorus of the song, and also helping out the accompaniment with her banjo —— But these are revelations which, if once begun, it might be difficult to end—

> "*Souls of Poets dead and gone,*
> *What Elysium have ye known,*
> *Happy field or mossy cavern,*
> *Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?*"

CHAPTER XIV.

"The Laird o' Roslin's daughter
Walked through the wood her lane,
When by came Captain Wedderburn,
A servant to the King."

NEXT morning there was a welcome bustle of preparation, for the boat had been successfully brought along to Stratford, and had now to be provisioned for the resumption of our voyage; likewise we had to write our last letters before bidding good-bye to civilisation and once more disappearing into the unknown. In the midst of all this, the door of our small sitting-room is opened, and Miss Peggy appears—just a little breathless.

"Say, now, what is your friend like?" she asks, with some eagerness.

"What friend?" says Queen Tita, looking up from her correspondence.

"Why, Colonel Cameron, of course. Is he very tall, and thin, and sandy-haired; with a small moustache, that has a streak of grey in it; and blue-grey eyes that look at you—well, as if they had seen you before?"

"Yes, that is rather like him—but what do you mean, Peggy?—he isn't come already, is he?"

"Well, it can't be he either," she continues. "He wouldn't think of going boating in a costume like that—a froak-coat, and a tall hat, yellow gloves, patent leather boots—well, if it is your friend, he looks as if he had just stepped out of Pall-mall."

"But where did you see him?"

"Whoever he is, he is down below, in the hall."

"In this hotel?"

"Yes—and—and he looked at me as I passed him—as if he thought I might belong to your party—at least that was my *fancy—I only* saw him for a moment ——"

"Of course it is Colonel Cameron!" Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaims at once. "Go away down and ask him to come up, Peggy."

"Me?" says the girl, in some alarm. "Oh, I couldn't. I don't know him. There might be a mistake."

"Well, I suppose I must go myself," she says, putting back her chair; and therewith she leaves the room and proceeds downstairs to receive her new visitor.

"I say," observes Miss Peggy, with some disappointment, "if that is Colonel Cameron, he isn't like a soldier at all. He is just like one of those long-legged icicled creatures you see walking in St. James's-street, stiff and starched and polished to the very finger-tips and the toes, and looking at you with a cold blank stare of indifference. Well, this one isn't quite so glacial as that—no, not quite; but it looks odd to see a tall Pall-mall dandy standing at the door of a Stratford hotel."

"Do you know this, Miss Peggy, that if you only got a glimpse of him as you came by, you managed to bring away a pretty faithful portrait. There's not the slightest doubt that that is Sir Ewen Cameron; though what has brought him down in that guise goodness only knows."

There were voices without; the next moment Queen Tita appeared, followed by a tall, thin, sun-tanned person who carried his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other. When he was introduced to Miss Peggy, his eyes rested on her for a second with a kindly look—as if there had already been some slight acquaintance between them: no doubt he had guessed that she was of our party when she had passed him below. Then he sat down, and proceeded to explain that he had received our Manageress's telegram in London only the night before, and had come straight away down, the first thing in the morning, to see what was wanted of him. It was clear that her invitation had been too vague; and now when she informed him that we had a berth at his disposal, that we proposed to start at once, and that she hoped he would come along with us *for such time as* he could spare, he not only accepted her proposal *with frank* prompitude, but, also, he did not seem to

think that so hurried a departure would involve any inconvenience. We should be coming to a town sooner or later? He could telegraph to Aldershot to have a few things sent along.

But, meanwhile, whither had fled our Peggy? She had suddenly gone out of existence—vanished clean away from us and disappeared; and in her place there was now an American young lady whom we could recall as coming in to us of an afternoon in London, to drink a cup of tea and listen with a grave courtesy to anyone who might be introduced to her. Alas! this was not our Peggy at all, with her mischief and her wild ways, and her laughing frankness and good-nature; this was a kind of stranger, serious-eyed, and gentle, and attentive; Peggy had gone away from us, and in her stead here was Miss Rosslyn come again: Miss Rosslyn, who would henceforth behave so perfectly and faultlessly that these sylvan haunts we were about to enter would be deprived of half their witchcraft and *diablerie.* And had not the girl's own instinct been right? Ought we not to have gone away into these secret solitudes entirely by ourselves? Why introduce this new comer to chill the atmosphere, and rob these pastoral glades of all their charm? What had we to do with Camerons, and Lochiels, and pibrochs, and stories of the clans? We had no wish to hear anything "savage and shrill" in the Forest of Arden; we wanted to hear the grass grow—we wanted to hear the fairies blowing their cowslip horns in the dew-wet silence of the summer nights.

"But you know, Sir Ewen," continued Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with much cheerfulness, "I cannot let you come with us unless you quite understand all the privations you will have to put up with. Don't you think you ought to go and see the boat; then you would know a little better what to expect?"

"But I heard all about your project before you started," said he, with a kind of gentle persuasiveness, "and I envied you. I never thought I was to be so fortunate as to be asked to join you; and now that I am here, I think your difficulty will be to get rid of me. Oh, I assure you I understand all the conditions of such a trip ——"

"Yes; but don't you think you ought to go and see the

boat?" she said again. "Wouldn't it be safer? Miss Rosslyn has nothing to do just now—she could walk along with you and show you where it is."

This proposal was made in simple good faith; but the fright that it clearly caused Miss Peggy demanded instant interference.

"No, no; not at all; hurry up with your letters. Sir Ewen won't mind waiting a little while; and then we can all go along together."

"And in the meantime," said our Colonel, "if you don't mind, I think I will go out and see if I can pick up a few boating things—I suppose in a riverside place one may find what one wants. And which did you say was the next town you would come to?"

"Worcester."

"Then I will telegraph to Aldershot when I am out—I suppose I shall find you here when I come back."

The moment he had gone, Mrs. Threepenny-bit turned to her young friend.

"Well?" she said, with a kind of pride.

But Miss Peggy answered nothing.

"Well?" she said again. "What do you think of him, Peggy?"

"Of course I don't know yet," said the young lady, evasively. "I thought he would look more like a soldier; he is like—like anybody else."

"Did you expect to find him wearing his Victoria Cross? Of course he came away just as he was. It is a soldier's pride to be able to start at a moment's notice. And I suppose he will get some of the Piccadilly look taken off before we set out—you may trust a Highlander to forage for himself. By-the-way, won't Murdoch be a proud lad when he hears that Colonel Cameron of Inverfask is going with us? We shall all have to wait upon ourselves now; it's very little attention any of us will get as long as Inverfask is on board."

"*Murdoch* won't forsake me," observed Miss Peggy, with *significant confidence.*

And yet with all our hurrying it was near mid-day when we were ready to start; but when we did get away our departure was most auspicious. There was a kind of general elation in setting forth; and then everything looked cheerful in the welcome sunlight; and there were warm, sweet airs blowing about: all promised well. Our Colonel had greatly pleased his hostess with his praises of the arrangements on board; he was delighted with everything, and especially surprised that he could stand upright in the saloon. Then Captain Columbus had been duly complimented on his success in bringing the boat through; and Murdoch, who was at first rather overcome with awe on hearing the name of our new guest, had been driven out of his senses with pride and gratification when Inverfask was considerate enough to address a few words to him in his native tongue; and finally, at the very last moment, a messenger had come running down to the canal-side with a parcel, for which Miss Peggy had been anxiously inquiring since ever she came to Stratford.

"And what is that, Peggy?" asks her hostess, looking at the long thing that has just been handed into the boat.

"Guess."

"Some magical kind of sunshade, is it?"

"No; it's a fishing-rod—an American one; I sent for it a long time ago, and have been wondering whether it was ever going to arrive. They say our American rods are very good; I hope this one will turn out all right."

"And since when have you taken to fishing, Peggy?" she asks.

"Oh, it isn't for myself; it's for him," the young lady answers, indicating a not uninterested bystander.

"Oh, it's for him, is it! Well, he can't wear *that* at his watch-chain!" says Mrs. Spitfire; and therewith she withdraws into the saloon, to beg Colonel Cameron not to bother any more with those Ordnance Survey maps.

And so once more we are gliding on through the still, wooded landscape; and the larks are filling all the wide spaces of the air with their singing; and the sunlight lies warm on the

hedges and fields. And this is Miss Peggy, who is perched up here astern, with more or less complete control of the tiller; although, as she seems rather absent-eyed, one has to exercise a general sort of surveillance over her.

"Yes," she is saying, "it was an extraordinary experience. No one who has never been to Stratford could imagine anything of the kind, or could understand how completely Shakespeare occupies and possesses the whole place. It is all Shakespeare; he seems just to fill the town. When you come out of Stratford you come into England again. Now we are back in England."

"But you needn't imagine you are beyond the reach of Shakespeare associations yet, Miss Peggy," one says to her. "Do you see that stretch of country there? Shakespeare had the tithes of it, and was no doubt very prompt in collecting them, for he appears to have been an extremely business-like person."

"What?—those actual fields!" she says, with quite a new interest.

"Those actual fields and slopes and woods. Over there is Welcombe, and we shall be at Bishopton directly. Now, wasn't it exceedingly generous of Francis Bacon to allow that fifth-rate actor to carry off all the profits of his plays—of Bacon's plays—and come away down here and buy tithes, and houses, and lands?—and yet they say Bacon himself liked money as well as most folk."

But Peggy betrays little interest in Lord Verulam; she is looking abroad over that tract of country as if it had acquired some new and mysterious value in her eyes.

"Didn't they talk at one time," she asks, "of buying the house that Shakespeare was born in, and taking it over to America? As if that would have been of any use at all!"

"But that was a very small project," one says to her. "Haven't you heard of the new one, that is to signalise the Presidency of Mr. Cleveland? Oh, yes; it's all settled. A *country so* wealthy as yours can get what it wants; there is *nothing that* cannot be bought, if you will only pay the price;

and they say the subscriptions are already pouring into the White House in streams. The petroleum men are determined to have it; and so are the pork men ——"

"But what are you talking about?" she says, coming back from that meditative survey of the distant landscape.

"Westminster Abbey. It is to be taken down stone by stone and shipped across, and put together again over there, monuments and everything. I tell you your country is rich enough to buy anything it wants. Westminster Abbey has to go. It is to be taken over and set up again—in Milwaukee."

"Now you are talking nonsense. But what I say is this," she continues, facing round as if to deliver a challenge, "that if we haven't got Shakespeare's birth-place, and the town and the fields where he lived, at least his literary fame, his position as a poet, belongs quite as much to us Americans as it does to you."

"Really?" one says to this audacious minx; "well, it may be so; but it was a precious lucky thing for Shakespeare that the discontented people who went over to found your country —I don't mean Captain John Smith's rogues and vagabonds, but the Nonconformists—it was a precious lucky thing for Shakespeare that they hadn't their own way here in this country, or there wouldn't have been a single player allowed to ply his trade. And where would have been the buying of tithes then? And the purchase of New Place? And the conveyancing of messuages, and tenements, and orchards, and gardens?"

"Why, what's that?" she exclaims suddenly, catching sight of something ahead.

"It looks like a series of gigantic steps and stairs, doesn't it?—but it is really a succession of locks. We have got to climb a hill, that's about all. And it will be a very tedious process. You'd better go inside and tell them we will have lunch now, and send Murdoch out to take the tiller."

We found luncheon an admirable method of passing the time necessary to get through this great bunch of locks (though we could have dispensed with a little of the bumping going on

outside); and now it was that Miss Peggy was brought more immediately into contact with our new guest, wh had been informing himself of our probable route by the study of maps. But she was a little silent. She did not display towards him anything of the quiet self-confidence which ordinarily characterised her manner in the presence of strangers. Once or twice she glanced timidly at him as he was talking to Queen Tita; whereas her custom was to look straight at people, especially if they were indifferent to her. Nor was there in her own conversation—with the person sitting next her—any trace of that careless wilfulness with which we had grown familiar. Where were her gibes now? She was distressingly well-behaved. And yet surely there was nothing in the manner or discourse of this tall and elderly soldier to strike dismay into a sensitive young soul: on the contrary, whenever the talk became general, and he looked across the table, as if addressing her also, his eyes seemed to regard her in a pleased and friendly fashion, as though they were saying, "Oh, yes; our acquaintance has been happily begun; we shall soon be friends—perhaps we are already".

And on this occasion, so far from playing Captain Bobadil, or magnifying his own profession, all his speech—prompted by a question of Queen Tita's about the possible intentions of the French Republic—was of the mischief wrought by newspapers in fanning national antipathies and goading nations into war. And here one was enabled to afford him unexpected corroboration.

"Wait a moment, Cameron; I have a story to tell you," says one of us. "Once upon a time there was a person—we will call him A.—maintaining that very position before a lot of people; and they wouldn't believe him. Very well: to convince them of the way in which mischief is caused by newspapers provoking quarrels, he said he would undertake, himself, to get up a perfectly brand-new international dispute in three weeks. Within three weeks, he declared he would have England and Germany at loggerheads—not England and Germany, of course, but the English and German newspapers, which

fortunately is a very different thing. Well, first of all he went to a German friend of his, whom we will call B. 'Look here,' says he, 'let's get up a row between Germany and England about something or other. You'll start it in Germany, and I'll take it up here; and then they'll all be at it directly, for of course no one newspaper will confess that it doesn't know what is going on.' 'But about what?' says B. 'Oh, anything; never mind what. Say Germany wants Heligoland.' 'All right.' Then the worthy Herr Doctor—it is some years since, mind, and both A. and B. were younger when they played that prank—he proceeded to write a very pathetic article about Heligoland, and he made no scruple about altering the well-known old rhyme so that it ran—

"*Fern ist der Strand,*
Weiss ist der Sand,
Das ist des Deutschen Heligoland!"

That article was printed in a Cologne paper. Immediately afterwards there appeared in a London daily paper another article, saying that the long-cherished desire on the part of the German people for the acquisition of Heligoland was again taking voice; and that aspirations which had for so long been merely sentimental promised now to become a serious demand, that would have to be faced by English statesmen. Then appeared a second article in the Cologne paper calling attention to the manner in which England was regarding Germany's now formulated claim. Of course, by this time the other papers were not to be left out in the cold. The question of the cession of Heligoland to Germany was taken up everywhere; statements that it had been discussed at Cabinet meetings were made, and authoritatively contradicted; one weekly paper, with tears in its eyes, appealed to Germany not to misuse her newly-found strength in the prosecution of such an invidious demand, but said if she came forward in a peaceable way, and argued the matter upon moral grounds, then perhaps we might be persuaded to restore the island to the Danes. Descriptive articles began to appear; there were pictures of Heligoland in the illustrated papers; and discussion everywhere. What was the

worth of it to England? What good would it do to Germany? Were German statesmen so arrogant that they must have this little bit of an island, just because they fancied it, and in spite of all considerations of history and race? What kind of argument was it to bring forward a bit of half-forgotten rhyme? The German journals said it was only a high-principled and sincere country like England that could continue, with a satisfied conscience, to hold such alien possessions as Gibraltar, Heligoland, Cyprus, and Malta. One English paper said it was understood that our Foreign Secretary attached no great importance to our keeping Heligoland, and was not inclined to contest the claim, if Germany insisted; another had it on the very best authority that the Foreign Secretary had expressed no opinion whatever on the subject. And meanwhile, while all this was going on, A. and B. met every other evening at the Culturverein, and smiled a little—like two Augurs—over their Hochheimer and cigars."

"And what came of it all?" says the Colonel.

"Oh, nothing; it died away. The thunder rumbled off; but even now, from time to time, you may hear a faint echo of it; and just as likely as not you'll find that perverted rhyme cropping up at the same time—though sometimes they print it—

"'*Fern ist der Strand,*
Weiss ist der Sand,
Das ist das deutsche Heligoland!'"

"Peggy," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regarding the girl with a world of meaning in her eyes, "they say that open confession is good for the soul."

And it is very likely that Miss Peggy would have answered with some remark equally impertinent, uncalled-for, and unjust, but that the presence of Colonel Cameron seemed to impose a wholesome restraint upon her. Indeed, she made no answer at all; she discovered that we were in the last of the locks; and her proposal that we should seize the opportunity to get ashore was unanimously and immediately adopted.

We now found ourselves on a considerable height; and all around us lay a richly-wooded country, the abundant foliage of

which kept shimmering or darkening as the slow-moving sun-rays and wide shadows trailed across the landscape. Over there, on the horizon line, were Bearley Bushes and Smither-field; here, as we leisurely followed the windings of the canal, were Wilmecot, and Gipsey Hill, and Newnham. Then we came to a long, straight aqueduct spanning a spacious valley; and far below us, in the hollow, was a line of railway—that going down to Alcester. The view from this point was one of the most extensive we had as yet encountered—the successive undulations of wood and spinney and grassy slope receding away into the south, where the low-lying hills, underneath the milk-white skies, were of a pale ethereal blue. Moreover, this canal, that was leading us into the wide district once known as the Forest of Arden, was very little like a canal. It seemed to be entirely disused and forsaken. We met with neither barge nor boat of any description. Here and there the still waters were almost choked with all kinds of aquatic plants; here and there were masses of the floating white buttercup, in blossom. A solitary neighbourhood this was, and a silent; yet there was a kind of persuasive charm in its very loneliness; while, for the rest, the afternoon was growing mellower in colour, and lending a warmer tone to all these masses of foliage. Miss Peggy, as we walked along, spoke but little; perhaps she was peopling those woods, and open spaces, and darker glades, with mysterious phantoms. Her eyes, at any rate, had no mischief in them now.

But as we drew near to Wootton Wawen—which is only about a mile or so from Henley-in-Arden—she turned her attention to the wild-flowers we were passing, and from time to time she stooped to add to the little nosegay in her hand. We knew her purpose. We knew whither was going that variegated little collection of red campions, blue hyacinths, yellow bed-straw, purple self-heal, golden cowslips, and the like simple blossoms.

"It is a very little trouble," she says (as if any apology was necessary), "and think of the gratitude I shall reap when they get them over there! I suppose I may honestly say, 'From the Forest of Arden,' in the letter?"

"Undoubtedly this was part of the ancient Forest of Arden, if that is what you mean—it stretched over the half of Warwickshire," one makes answer. "I don't know when the district was disafforested; but in Shakespeare's own time they hunted red-deer in these Warwickshire woods—you'll find it all described in the 'Polyolbion'—'our old Arden here' is Drayton's phrase; and he was a Warwickshire man. Yes; I think you may fairly say these flowers are from the Forest of Arden."

"That is all I wanted to know. And yet," she continues, "I am not sure it would be kind to send any of them to my sister Emily. It seems such a shame that I should be seeing all these places, while she is at home."

"Her time will come, surely. She will be in England some day."

"But who will take her about like this?" Miss Peggy is good enough to say. "Do you think, now, there ever was an American here before?"

"In this precise spot? I should think it was highly improbable."

She was silent for a minute or two as we were walking along.

"I suppose our people would want to rush through. Well; it is very strange, when you get used to this dreamlike kind of existence, how very natural it seems; and how far away the outside world seems to be. I wonder, when I am back in New York, whether I shall be able to recall the feeling of being lost, and being quite happy in being lost? All the people and things I used to know seem to be gone—or in an outside ring so far away that you hardly ever hope to get back to it. And yet," adds Miss Peggy, with a smile, "I don't feel in the least bit miserable to find myself cut off from the rest of the world, and forgotten, and alone."

"You are not quite alone."

"No; not quite," she says; and then she goes on, in a very simple and natural fashion: "Do you know, I like your friend the Colonel?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I like him. He doesn't try to show off."

"Did you think he would?"

"And I'm not so much afraid of him as I expected. No, hardly at all; he is so quiet; and—and—I like the way he looks at you—he doesn't scrutinise—he has a pleasant way of looking at you. What do people say of him?"

"The public, do you mean—the newspapers?"

"No, no; the people who know him."

"Well; he bears the reputation of being a pretty strict disciplinarian; but his men are said to be extraordinarily devoted to him all the same; and I know his brother officers are rather fond of him. I remember a young fellow one night at the Rag—at dinner—saying simply enough, 'Well; I don't *like* Cameron; that isn't it: I love him'."

"Is it long since his wife died?"

"Yes; some years."

"Was she pretty?"

"She was very good-looking. She was one of the Lennoxes of Coulterhill—they're all a handsome family."

"How old is he?" continues this inquisitive young person; indeed, that is one of her peculiarities; when she is interested, however slightly, in anyone, she must needs know all about his or her situation in life, and surroundings, and prospects—perhaps for the better spinning of aimless little romances.

"How old is he? Oh, he is just everybody's age. Don't you know that there is a long period—an interval between being insignificantly young and distressingly old—in which all nice people and all interesting people dwell, without particularly counting years. You may call it the broad platform of life, if you like; and a few Mays or Decembers are not allowed to count. Colonel Cameron is just in the middle of existence—like the rest of us ——"

"Oh, do you take me in, too?" she says.

"Why, certainly. Do you call yourself insignificantly young?"

"But I want to be counted in!" she says, promptly. "I like to have plenty of company. I should prefer being with the happy majority. Oh, yes; I want to be on the middle platform, with the rest of the people."

"If it comes to that, young lady, there are two or three little tricks and artifices in which you are a good deal older than Ewen Cameron, or any one of us."

"Ah, don't say that!" she pleads, with much pathos. "I have been so good!"

"I suppose you wrote a very pretty letter to that long-coated metaphysician, thanking him for all the information he sent you."

"Indeed I did not, then," she says, warmly. "I did not write to him at all. For I did not ask him to send us any information; I suppose we could have got it out of the guide-books in any case."

But meanwhile, as we have been thus leisurely strolling along, the waning day had been still further deepening in colour. Overhead the silvery-grey heavens were now mottled with soft lilac; towards the west were long bands of purple cloud, their lower edges fringed with crimson fire; beneath these, and behind the various clumps of foliage in front of us, were breadths of golden yellow, that only reached us through the darkened branches in mild flashes of light. We had been seriously delayed, moreover, by one or two difficult bridges, particularly in the neighbourhood of Lowsom Ford; and now, as these fires were fading out, and as Captain Columbus had discovered that somewhere not very far away he could get stabling for the horse, it was resolved to call a halt for the night. We were to be up betimes in the morning, for there was a long day before us, to say nothing of the wild peril and adventure of getting through the King's Norton and West Hill Tunnels. So we chose out a meadow-bank where there were some convenient willow-stumps and alder-bushes, and there we made fast; and then Murdoch—now in the Forest of Arden, and probably wishing he were at home in a better place, though his courtesy would not allow him to say so—was besought to prepare some food for his co-mates and brothers in exile.

A ceremony, of deepest interest to at least one person present, now took place. It was at Miss Peggy's timid *suggestion.* Wouldn't one like to put the American trout-*rod together, to* see whether it met with approval? If it were

not quite satisfactory, she said, she could have it changed. And here was a stretch of smooth water; hadn't we anything in the shape of a line? Now as we had brought plenty of all kinds of tackle with us—on chance—we made prettty sure of finding a small reel that would fit; and there was still enough light in the gathering dusk to show us how the line went out.

And what a dainty toy did this turn out to be, when we pulled the circular shaft from out its furry cover, and found in the grooves of the shaft the light-golden, hexagonal pieces of spliced cane all neatly packed; and who could have aught but admiration—were he fisherman or no fisherman—for the delicately-ribbed handle, and the silver ferrules and rings, and the small shining bands of rose-red silk? The inscription on the metal portion of the butt, too: really, when one had put this work of art together, and had taken a single glance at it, it was quite apparent that it was far too bright and good for human nature's daily food. What!—make this beautiful little golden toy, with its rose-red silk and its silver sockets, an instrument to thrash the sullen surface of a Scotch loch, in hours of driving rain, with the heavy storm-clouds coming lower and lower down the hillside, and darkening the world as they descended! No, no; the proper place for such a thing of beauty was a corner of the hall, in alliance with the various trophies of the chase, so that young ladies, on their way from the dining-room to the drawing-room, might be invited to admire its elegance, and pliancy, and pretty colour. To take this dainty thing out for any kind of actual work? Why, it might get wet!

And yet, when we had rummaged about and found a reel small enough to be attached to the butt, it was very speedily discovered that this plaything of a rod had a remarkable faculty for sending out a line. Perhaps it wasn't so much of a toy, after all? If it felt a little "whippy" at first, the hand soon got used to that; and it was most satisfactory to stand here in the dusk and watch how easily the undulating line went out, and how lightly—with a touch like a butterfly—it fell on the wan water. Our Colonel tried a cast or two, and declared that, for this delicate kind of work, it was a most excellent instrument.

Miss Peggy was also allowed a little practice; and as there was nothing attached to the line there was no risk of her hanging up artificial flies on the trees and bushes as thickly as ever Orlando hung up his rhymes when he was wandering through these very glades. Finally, Mrs. Threepenny-bit got the pretty plaything into her possession; but this was with a view to reading the inscription on the silver band; and she affected to be greatly surprised by its simplicity.

"Well, I declare! not a single scrap of poetry. Why, Peggy, you might have quoted a line or two just to please him —'When this you see, remember me'; or, 'The rose is red, the violet's blue, the grass is green, and so are you'. Or a motto, even—'Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?'"

"I think you are very impertinent," says Miss Peggy, with an air of much dignity; and she takes away the rod from that envious scrap of a creature, and offers to help in putting it back in its case.

During dinner that night—whether it was the sensation of solitariness inspired by these lonely neighbourhoods, or whether it was that her fear of the tall Colonel had not quite worn off—Miss Peggy was again rather silent, listening with a respectful attention, but rarely saying anything. Of course, she was not entirely dumb; and one chance remark she made—as coming from a person of so retiring a disposition—seemed to strike Colonel Cameron with a little surprise. By accident he had gone back to the subject of the various incitements to war, and was talking to Queen Tita about the times when the love of this or that fair lady was a common cause of strife. One of us happened to say that he had heard of a tournament in our own day—or, rather, a joust—of a very idyllic nature. It was a lady in the North, who had two suitors, both of them in every way eligible, and both of them equally pressing in their suit; and, to settle the matter, she said she would marry the one who wrote the best poem on Mary Queen of Scots. She was as good as her word; and married the successful competitor. *Whereupon* Miss Peggy remarked quietly—

"*I am* pretty sure she knew beforehand which of them could

write the best poem; and that was why she took that way of deciding".

Well, it was a shrewd remark for a young woman to make; and Colonel Cameron glanced up with the least touch of surprise: you see, she had been so very modest and quiet and unassuming since he had joined our party. But we were privately of opinion that before very long Inverfask would find out for himself that our Peggy—though quite a Characterless Person—was no fool.

And fortunate it was for us that this subject had been started; for in speaking of this or the other noble lady whose name was connected in legend or history with some tragic deed, Cameron happened to ask his hostess if she knew the ballad of "The Twa Bonnie Gordons".

"I daresay you will know the story," he said, "for there are two or three ballads about it—'Gordon o' Bracklay,' I think one of them is called, or 'The Baron o' Bracklay'. But this version I have has never been in print, as far as I know, and I think it is finer than any of them. My mother used to sing it—to a very singular and pathetic air: let me see—I think I could repeat the words to you ——"

"Oh, will you," she said, quickly.

"It is hardly a pleasant story they have to tell; but the ballad is fine—as fine as any I know—

"'Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,
He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day's dawing,
"O Gordon of Brackla, proud Gordon, come down,
There's a sword at your threshold mair sharp than your own"'."

He repeated these lines almost in an undertone, and slowly—perhaps to give the two women-folk a better chance of making out the Scotch; but as he went on there was a curiously vibrant quality in his voice that made his recitation singularly impressive—

"'Arise now, gay Gordon!' his lady 'gan cry,
'For there is fierce Inveray driving your kye;'
'How can I go, lady, and win them again,
When I have but ae sword where he has got ten?'

"'Arise now, my maidens, leave rock and leave fan;
How blest had I been had I married a man!
Arise now, my maidens, take lance and take sword:
Go, milk the ewes, Gordon, for I shall be lord!'

"Up sprang the brave Gordon, put his helm on his head,
Laid his hand on his sword, and his thigh o'er his steed;
But he stooped low and said, as he kissed his proud dame
'There's a Gordon rides out that will never ride hame'.

"There rode wi' fierce Inveray thirty and three,
And nane wi' the Gordon save his brother and he;
Twa gallanter Gordons did never sword draw,
But against three-and-thirty, wae's me! what were twa!

"Wi' swords and wi' daggers they rushed on them rude,
And the twa bonnie Gordons lay bathed in their bluid;
Frae the mouth o' the Dee to the source o' the Spey,
The Gordons mourn for them and curse Inveray.

"'O came ye by Brackla, and what saw ye there?
Was the young widow weeping and tearing her hair?
'I came down by Brackla; I looked in, and oh!
There was mirth, there was feasting, but naething o' woe.

"'Like a rose bloomed the lady and blithe as a bride;
A bridegroom young Inveray stood by her side;
She feasted him there as she ne'er feasted lord,
Though the bluid o' her husband was red on his sword.'

"O there's dule in the cottage, if there's mirth in the ha',
For the twa bonnie Gordons who are deid and awa';
To the bush comes the bud, and the flower to the plain,
But the twa gallant Gordons come never again."

When he had finished, there was a second of silence; and then it was Peggy who spoke.

"I—I hope he killed her!" the girl said—with white lips.

A little later on—well, perhaps, there was a half-confessed feeling that this fierce and piteous story had been all too terrible for these tranquil solitudes—anyhow it was Miss Peggy who timidly suggested that we should get outside to see what the night was like, and perhaps go ashore, also, for a stroll through the meadows and lanes, if any such were to be found. So forthwith we went—Sir Ewen lighting a big cigar by way of *preparation;* but as for going ashore, the first one who tried *that discovered* that the grass was soaking wet with dew.

Accordingly we all of us with much content took up our places in the stern-sheets of the boat: with much content, for the night-air was sweet; and there was a silence not disturbed by the stirring of a leaf; and there were dark glades and vistas between the trees which, if one liked, one could people with all kinds of spectral figures, who could perform a ghostly play for us.

The contrast between that still darkness all around and the crimson glow of our little floating home was strange enough. Sitting out here, we were spectators of both; indeed, not only could we look into the glare of light within—which seemed to illumine a fairy palace—but also we could see where some of the softened radiance, streaming through the windows, touched here and there a branch of alder or a willow-stump. But if these glades near at hand were steeped in the shadow of overhanging leaves, the heavens above us were clear and cloudless, the great vault palpitating with myriad upon myriad of stars. There sat Cassiopeia on her silver throne; the jewel Rastaben burned fierce on the forehead of the Dragon; the pale Andromeda was there, and Perseus with uplifted sword; the brilliant Vega gleamed on the invisible strings of the Harp; and the shining wonders of the Plough, white, trembling, and yet constant, throbbed in the pure ether. All the life of the world seemed to be in those lambent skies; there was nothing here around us but impalpable gloom and death. That impression lasted but for a minute or two. Perhaps it was our coming forth from the saloon that had startled the woods into silence. Anyhow, the next moment a sudden sound sprang into the night, flooding all the darkness with its rich and piercing melody —*jug, jug, jug—jug, jug, jug, tir-o-ee*—a joyous, clear, full-throated note, deep-gurgling now, and again rising with thrills and tremors into bursts of far-reaching silver song that seemed to shake the hollow air. A single nightingale had filled the woods with life. We cared no more for those distant and silent stars. It was enough to sit here in the gracious quiet and listen to the eager tremulous outpouring of this honeyed sound—and to remember that we were in the Forest of Arden.

CHAPTER XV.

"Did I but purpose to embark with thee
On the smooth surface of a summer's sea;
While gentle zephyrs play in prosperous gales,
And Fortune's favour fills the swelling sails;
But would forsake the ship, and make the shore,
When the winds whistle, and the tempests roar?
No, Henry, no: one sacred oath has tied
Our loves; one destiny our life shall guide;
Nor wild nor deep our common way divide."

In the dim lands that lie between sleeping and waking, and while as yet the dawn is low in the eastern skies, there are shadows moving hither and thither, and a sound as of music echoing down the forest glades. Fainter and fainter it grows. The booted and belted figures, with their garments of green and feathered caps, melt away into the distance—"*The horn, the horn, the lusty, lusty horn*," is hardly heard now—and at last the hoarse chorus ceases, and there is silence. Silence but for a moment; for here is the gay-hearted and merry-tongued Rosalind, in russet cloak and velvet cap, followed by her bewildered lover. "Bid your friends," she says to him; "for if you will be married to-morrow, you shall; and to Rosalind, if you will." Then scarcely have they gone when there is a blowing of silver bugles; slowly and gradually richly-clad figures come trooping in; a magic light awakes: these are no longer glades in the forest, but spacious halls; and the bridal guests have arrived. A murmur passes through the crowd. The blaze of light falls upon a figure in white satin and silks and pearls; and, as the Duke leads her forward, her veil is partly removed, and the shining-eyed and smiling and queen-like Rosalind, now blushing as a bride, and yet imperious in *her very yielding*, advances to her lover with outstretched hand. "*To you I give* myself, for I am yours." And again there is a

hushed sound of music—of stringed instruments this time—and presently the brilliant assemblage is moving slowly through a dance, but ever with the radiant white figure attracting all eyes. As one looks and listens, the gay-coloured company grows paler: the music, too—there is something strange about it—it is a monotonous sound—*ur-r-r-r-r-r*—and then again the calling of a cuckoo—*cuckoo, cuckoo*—as if we were still in the woods. And whither has gone that glare of light? There are wan greys appearing—and wide spaces; the bridal party has dispersed; a new day has dawned. And now we know: the cuckoo is calling to us from out the dripping leaves; the *ur-r-r-r-r-r* is a continuous rattling on the roof above us; those magic fires have been extinguished by the heavy rain; and the ghosts have vanished back into the night.

"For the last two mortal hours, I do believe," says our Colonel, as he is tying his shoes in the cramped cabin, "that brute has been at it! Fancy a cuckoo calling in such a deluge! It can only be to make a fool of us."

And when one at length is dressed, and ready, and goes into the saloon, perhaps it is with some vague curiosity to see whether our own flesh-and-blood Rosalind in any way resembles that spectral white-satined Rosalind of the dawn. One finds Miss Peggy alone, and up at the further end of the saloon. What she has been about is clear. There are branches of alder projecting from the bank; she has opened the window just far enough to draw some of them inside and spread them across the pane; and is now contemplating that ingenious piece of decoration. When she turns round to say "Good morning," her first concern is to dry her dripping fingers and wrists.

"A pleasant morning, Miss Peggy!"

"Oh! I don't mind," she says, with her usual cheerful carelessness. "After such a night as last night, I am ready to forgive anything. Besides, where should you have patience with the weather if not here? 'The penalty of Adam—the season's difference.' I'm ready to take what comes. There's another thing: when it does rain, I like to hear it rain like

that; a good business-like downpour means to have it out and done with it. You'll see we shall have a fine day; I'm certain of it."

No; there was very little that was phantasmal about this highly matter-of-fact and well-contented personage. Perhaps if she had been clad in the costume which she wore for a few minutes that evening at Stratford, she might have looked a little like the dream-Rosalind who was figuring about in this neighbourhood before the day broke; but she was a much more actual and substantial individuality than the shining bride who had paled and vanished with the coming of the dawn. There was a healthful and wholesome pink in her peach-soft cheek that spectres do not possess; the light that shone in her eyes (and that was sufficiently bright for all practical purposes) was not borrowed from any unholy glare; besides, there was a self-confidence and a cool audacity in her demeanour that no well-behaved ghost would display—for ghosts, if they are anything at all, are sensitive, shrinking, retiring creatures. Nor do ghosts—well-behaved ghosts—try to whistle when they are drying their fingers.

"Hullo! what's that?" says Miss Peggy, turning suddenly round.

A slight scraping noise had attracted her attention. And now what do we behold?—what but those branches of alder being slowly withdrawn by an invisible hand. She regards this extraordinary phenomenon for a second—until the last leaf has disappeared—and then the truth flashes upon her.

"The boat is moving! Are we off already?"

It is even so. For it appears that Captain Columbus, being anxious for an early start, has come quietly down through the meadows, unmoored the Nameless Barge, and is now, from the stern, poling her across to the tow-path, where the horse and Horse-Marine are waiting. Perhaps it has not hitherto been explained in this veracious chronicle that we invariably chose our moorings on the side opposite the tow-path, so that, in the improbable event of any barge coming along in the night, we should not be run into. Moreover, this also removed

from us the possibility of visitors, if visitors there could be in regions that showed no sign of human life.

At breakfast, all assembled, the chief topic of discussion is naturally the tunnels we shall have to encounter some time or other during the day; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit, from certain things she has heard, seems a little apprehensive. Not so Miss Peggy.

"Why should you distrust the boat?" the young lady says. "Hasn't she done very well so far? There has been no danger at all, except once or twice when she tilted over a bit, and that did nothing but break a few dishes. Why should you think there was any risk in going through tunnels."

"The risk is this, Miss Peggy," one says to her. "The West Hill Tunnel, according to Captain Columbus, is over a mile and a half long, and it is absolutely dark. We shall most likely be tacked on to the end of a long string of barges—for we shall be on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal then—barges that have been waiting for the steam-launch; and the tail of a long sea-serpent of that kind is just as likely as not to flop about considerably, especially as we shall be such a light appendage to those heavy craft. Well, suppose she gets an extra hard knock against the wall of the tunnel? One thing is positively certain, that if she were to fill and sink, every person on board must inevitably be drowned. How could you be picked up in the darkness? Besides, the people on board the steam-launch wouldn't know anything of what was happening; they would continue to haul away, even supposing the boat was under water.

"Surely," said our Colonel, "if she were to sink, the drag would soon make itself felt."

"Yes; but where would you be in the meantime? However, I put these considerations before you people not for the purpose of frightening you, but in order to recommend to you a little common sense. There is no need why any of you should run a quite unnecessary risk. Only one person need be on board the boat, to steer. Very well; the owner of this noble craft proposes to accept that responsibility, for the better

security of his own property. All you people—and Columbus and Murdoch as well; for the Horse-Marine will have gone on with the horse—you people will be safely on board the steam-launch; that is how you ought to go through."

"Amongst a lot of Birmingham bargemen!" cries Queen Tita. "They'll be all fighting and swearing!"

"If you allow me to accompany you," Colonel Cameron says, in his quiet way, "I think you may make me answerable for the preservation of the Queen's peace."

"Please," says Miss Peggy, looking up, and addressing the person who proposes to take charge of the boat through the tunnels, "if I'm not in the way, may I stay with you?"

"How touching! How very touching!" observes Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with her usual gratuitous malice. "It quite reminds one of the devotion and constancy of the Nut-brown Maid. Oh, quite touching!"

At this impertinent taunt the young lady blushes vividly (which she would not have done had it been uttered in the presence of Jack Duncombe), and hastily she makes answer—

"I want to see the fun, that's all".

"Well, now," says Colonel Cameron, to sum up the matter, "do you think it is worth while for any one of us to desert the ship? A little spice of danger is rather pleasant at times; and, if there is such a thing, we ought all to run an equal chance, don't you think? Of course, if you ladies would rather go on board the steam-launch, I will go with you ——"

"I for one," observes Queen Tita, in distinct tones, "am not going on board any steam-launch—among those men."

"And I would much rather remain here," says the Nut-brown Maid, modestly.

"Very well," he says, "that is a bargain; we will stay and keep the steersman company. And I don't think you will find either Murdoch or Captain Columbus wanting to run away."

When we went outside after breakfast we found the *morning had* cleared up wonderfully; there were breaks of *vivid blue* overhead; shafts of sunlight here and there; and a

brisk wind stirring the foliage of the wide, richly-wooded country. By this time we had got on to Kingswood Junction, where the Birmingham and Warwick and Birmingham and Stratford Canals are connected; and shortly thereafter, as we struck away to the north-west, we had to climb a series of steps and stairs, getting thereby into a long, level stretch of ten miles without a single lock to bar our way. This was a very beautiful landscape that lay all around us, if it was not particularly romantic or impressive; and the day was growing finer and finer; indeed, the sun was almost too hot at times, and we were glad of the cool wind that stirred the trees and put a silver ripple on the water. Occasionally the woods seemed to close in upon us; the light breeze did not get at the surface of the canal; on the contrary, that perfect mirror reflected every leaf and twig and branch of the overhanging oak and alder and ash. Now and again we came to a little old-fashioned bridge, of weather-tinted red brick—a pleasant colour among all these greens. And then we would find ourselves between steep and high banks, all hanging with leaves and tendrils and Spring blossom—here and there a golden blaze of furze or broom, more rarely a cream-white mass of sweet-smelling hawthorn. Of course we were all ashore now, sometimes overtaking the boat, sometimes allowing it to glide far ahead of us—the only living and moving thing in the solitary world. This part of the country is rich in song-birds. All the air was filled with their singing; near and far, from bush and copse and hawthorn bough, and from the wide white spaces of the sky, poured an inexhaustible stream of melody, a universal rejoicing after the rain. And Miss Peggy was singing, too, at times, in a careless fashion, when you happened to cease chatting to her, or when she stooped to gather speedwells from the warm and sunny banks. "O, it's I was walking one morning in May"—this was what she was at; and probably she was not in the least conscious that she was in a measure imitating Jack Duncombe, any more than she was aware that those speedwells she was gathering were not anything near so blue and translucent as her eyes.

"Well," she said at last, when she had gathered her little

nosegay, and was free to walk on without more ado, "it was very nice of them."

"Nice of whom?"

"Why, the people who cut this winding lane through all this beautiful country, and then filled it with water so that you could float along it, and then left it for us. It was very kind of them, and very lucky for us that we can have it all to ourselves."

"Wait till you get on to the Birmingham and Worcester—you'll have some company then."

"Rough company? No, I don't think so. All the people I have met have been most civil."

"It doesn't much matter. I have told you before, if there's any bad language, you won't understand a word of it—it will be in the dark dialect of Brummagem."

"Talking about bad language," Miss Peggy says, in her off-hand way, "do you know why it's useless to try to block up the river Niagara?"

"Oh, go away with your preposterous conundrums!"

"But, really, can't you guess?" she says, with innocent eyes. "And why should you despise conundrums? Is it because you're not very clever at finding them out?"

"Well, there's something in that. As you grow a little older, young lady, and gather experience of the world's ways, you'll find that the great majority of people comfort themselves by despising everything of which they are ignorant and everything they can't do. It's a wholesome rule of life; it makes for content. Suppose you can't hit a haystack at thirty yards and can't throw a fly, your best plan is to call field-sports brutalising, and a survival of the instincts of the savage. Suppose, on the other hand, you can shoot and fish and ride to hounds and all the rest of it, and yet you can't make anything out of Carpaccio, then you may safely call lovers of the fine arts æsthetes, prigs, and effeminate creatures generally. If you can't drink wine, elevate your abstinence into a religion, and look upon yourself as a marvel of virtue; if you can't get on without wine, you may hint that teetotallers, if all were

known, might be found to be no better than they should be. If you are a scientific person ——"

"I'm not," says Peggy.

"Don't interrupt. If you are a scientific person, you can make light of the practical value of the Greek and Latin literatures; if you are learned in the humanities, you may call science a mere blind empiricism—the workings of a mole in the dark. If you're a plain woman, you can't be expected to approve of wax dolls; if you're a pretty woman, you may suggest that the plain women would prefer to be a little more like wax dolls if they could. It is a pleasing habit—and widespread; it tends to the general comfort and content."

"And that is why you don't like conundrums?" continues Miss Peggy (who does not seem so much impressed by this sermon as she might be). "Because you can't find them out? Well, I wouldn't admit it if I were you. I would rather try a little. Come now I'll make it easy for you. I'll give you a friendly lead. Why is it you needn't try to block up the Niagara river—put a hindrance across it, don't you see?—something to stop it ——"

"Oh, get away with your nonsense!"

"But don't you see the answer?—think a moment! It's as plain as anything! Must I tell you, then? The reason you needn't try to block up the river Niagara?—well, because dam it you can't!"

One contemplates this person. She is young; and fair to look upon. There is even an appearance of maiden guilelessness on the smooth white forehead and in the shining eyes. But how so seemly an exterior can enclose a mental and moral nature so lost to all sense of shame is a problem too distressing to face. One walks on in silence.

"Of course," she remarks, proudly, "if you choose to put wicked meanings into what I say, I can't help it."

"Live and learn," one answers her. "It is always pleasant to watch the new development of manners—the conduct of the coming generation. And I wonder what Colonel Cameron will think——"

In an instant her attitude is entirely changed.

"Ah, you wouldn't be so mean!"

"Don't you think he would be interested?" one asks of her, impassively. "A kind of small revelation in its way?"

"No," she says—and her earnestness of entreaty is not wholly a pretence—"you're capable of a good lot, but not of *that*. You couldn't be so mean! Tales told out of school! Well, look here, if you will promise not to repeat that to Colonel Cameron, I will promise never to ask you another conundrum as long as I live. And I've got some very good ones," she adds, demurely.

"Where did you get them? From some funny young man in Brooklyn?"

"No, it wasn't—it was from a girl.

"What kind of a girl?"

"I won't tell you her name; you would recognise it. She made several of them herself."

"And all of the same character?"

"Most of them. Well," continues Miss Peggy, with returning confidence, "there's really no harm in them, except what you choose to put there. Not a bit of harm. Say, are you going to write a book about this trip?"

"It is possible."

"If you do, will you tell those things about me?"

"I daren't tell *all* I know about you—certainly not."

"Ah, but that's just what I want!" she says. "If you told everything, I should have nothing to fear. If you told *everything*, then the reader would recognise before him the picture of an absolutely perfect human being. That's me. I have always been like that; and you know it; for I have told you before. But I dare say you will go and distort things, and make me out a wretch if you can, whereas you know better, if you would only be honest."

She had got a bit of thread, and as she walked along she was tying the speedwells together.

"*I wonder,* now, if you can guess why Robinson Crusoe *was startled* when he saw the footprint in the sand?

"I thought you made a promise a little while ago," one says to her.

"Oh, that's all very well," rejoins this impenitent creature. "Why, you are just dying to hear some more of them. But you sha'n't. I won't tell you another one. And then, of course, if you do say a word to Colonel Cameron—but no, you couldn't be so mean as that, even if you tried."

Then she adds irrelevantly—

"I say, are you going to let me stay outside and see what's going on, while we are in those tunnels?"

"If you are good; and if you put on a waterproof."

"Well, shouldn't we get into the boat again, and have everything ready? Besides, I have a letter to write that I want to have posted at King's Norton."

It was not, however, until a long time after that—and after some miles of pleasant sailing through a richly-cultivated and cheerful-looking country—that we drew near to the first of the tunnels. This was found to be a sufficiently simple affair; moreover, we had the whole passage to ourselves; for we were still on the Birmingham and Stratford Canal, where we had encountered but little traffic. And yet it was with a strange and eerie feeling that we left the warm white air and shot under this low archway into a cold and clammy darkness that was pierced far away ahead by a needle-point of light. Our method of propelling the boat is technically known on the canals as "legging"; that is to say, Captain Columbus and Murdoch lay on their backs on the roof of the saloon, and shoved with their feet against the dripping brickwork encircling us. We made no great speed; in fact, there was so little way on the boat that steering was next to impossible: on the other hand, there was an abundance of bumping from side to side, though our Colonel did his best, with one of the poles, to mitigate these concussions. And thus we crept along.

"Why, it's nothing at all!" said Miss Peggy—her voice echoing strangely in the hollow-sounding vault. "Where is the danger?"

She was answered by the boat again swinging against the

side of the tunnel in a fashion that would probably have tipped her into the water had she not been clinging on to the iron rod; but she still maintained there was nothing to be afraid of; and also that the mysterious light somehow reminded her of Venice.

But all this while the white pin-point far ahead of us had been gradually growing larger and more brilliant; still larger and larger it grew, until it seemed to be a sort of circular channel leading out into a bewildering glare of greenish-yellow; we could make out more clearly now our environment of moist and dripping brickwork; and then, with a kind of soft glory dazzling our eyes, we slowly emerged into the warm, glowing world again, to find ourselves surrounded by hanging masses of sunlit foliage.

Murdoch rose from his recumbent position on the roof, and looked back at the tunnel through which we had come.

"It's an ahfu' place that," we heard him say, in awe-stricken tones, to Captain Columbus—doubtless he had never been in a tunnel in his life before.

"Oh! that's nothing, lad," said Columbus, who was now also standing erect, and shaking the grit and water from his clothes. "That's only a baby tunnel. Wait till you come to the West Hill."

Then we went on to King's Norton; and, having to post Miss Peggy's letter, we strolled along and up to the village. We found it a quaint, little, out-of-the-world-looking place, with a wide green, surrounding that a number of old-fashioned brick and timber houses, and dominating all a well-proportioned church. In the post-office there were some newspapers for sale—weekly newspapers; but we had lost interest in the great and busy world we had forsaken; and these heavy compilations of paragraphs did not seem attractive. When we got leisurely back to the boat again we discovered that Captain Columbus had taken advantage of our absence to bait the horse, so that we were enabled to resume our voyage forthwith.

It was about a mile after that—and we were now on the *Worcester* and Birmingham Canal—that we came in sight of the

entrance to West Hill Tunnel, and likewise perceived that there were a large number of barges waiting for the steam-launch to return and take them through. As yet there was no line of procession formed; and as we could discover no master of ceremonies, we took up a modest position by the bank opposite the tow-path and awaited instructions. Our neighbours paid us little heed; as it happened, there was a contest of wits going on; and as the rival jesters were far apart, and had to bawl out their merry quips, they won loud and general laughter by their efforts. With our strictest attention, however, we could make nothing of these recondite japes. We wanted some interpreter, as in the homiletic *Gesta Romanorum*, to come in with "*Carissimi*" and an explanation. Meanwhile, at Queen Tita's request, Murdoch had lit the candles in the saloon; but this was to be merely an experiment; for one knew not whether the light might not subsequently prove to be a distraction to the steersman responsible for the safety of these people.

"Look there!" cries Peggy. "Look at that pony! Did you ever see anything more picturesque in Italy?"

And a picturesque little animal it was—a piebald black and white; with cream-coloured ear-coverings and crimson tassels; brass ornaments on its forehead; blue and white ribbons at the side of its head; a bunch of hay hanging from its collar; a nose-tin of burnished copper suspended from its neck. Quite a gay little creature it was; and a marked feature in the slow procession of animals that now left the side of the canal to go forward and await us at the other end of the tunnel.

Then appeared a black and grimy little steam-launch; there was an interview with Columbus and a production of papers; we were furnished with a lamp to be fixed at the bow; and thereupon the burly little steamer proceeded to head the long line. How that line was formed it was hard to say; but it was clear we were to be at the tail-end of it; and, indeed, as barge after barge moved away, we had no more than time to throw a rope to the last of them and get attached. The huge black snake before us was disappearing into the bowels of the earth with a marvellous rapidity; one had to steer as straight as one

could for the small and narrow arch at the base of that mighty mass of masonry; the semicircular opening seemed to close around us; and the next moment we were in darkness. This sudden plunge into the unknown was sufficiently startling; for now there was no welcome star of light far away ahead, while the red glow in the saloon told us nothing of our whereabouts or our proper course. We only knew there was a wall around us, for we grated along this side, and then banged against that; and, altogether, the situation was unpleasant. But matters mended a little. Whether the smoke from the launch had lessened or not, one could at length make out, at a considerable distance along, two dull spots of orange, doubtless two lamps; and these at least gave some indication of our course, and some guidance for steering. The worst of it was that this light boat at the end of these heavy barges would not properly answer her helm; the "swing" they gave her was too powerful; and all that could be done was for Columbus and Murdoch at the bow, and the Colonel astern, to keep shoving with hands or feet, as occasion offered, to prevent the boat from tearing herself to pieces against the almost invisible wall. Not a word was spoken, for no one knew what might happen the next second; the only certain thing was that, whatever might befall, we were powerless to avert it. In the previous tunnel, while we were being "legged" through, if we had come to a difficulty we should have stopped to consider; now we were being dragged irresistibly along, by a force with which we had no possible communication.

"I say," at length remarks Miss Peggy, who is standing on the steering thwart, and holding on to the iron rod, "do you see those two small lights far away along there?"

"I should hope so. They're all I've got to go by."

"Well, but if you take your eyes off them for a moment, you'll see other two lights in the dark—of a curious pale purple."

"I suppose you know what complementary colours are?"

"This is a far more ghostly place than the other—I wish *we were well* out of it," she says.

Suddenly into the hollow-sounding vault there springs a

shrill, high, plaintive note; and we find that one of the younger bargemen has begun to relieve the tedium of this subterranean passage by a pathetic ballad. So silent is the tunnel—for there is only a dull throbbing far away of the engine of the steam-launch—that every word can be distinctly heard; and by guessing here and there at peculiarities of pronunciation, one can make out easily enough the main current of these stories. For it is not one, but many pieces, that this Brummagem Orpheus, descended into the deeps of the earth, has in his repertory; and generally they are found to deal with the trials, and experiences, and sorrows of a young man:

"My father died a drunkard,
And I was left alone,
To fight the world all by myself,
With ne'er a house or home".

Or again the high, shrill, nasal voice would tell how this hapless young man was entrapped into going to sea:

"The captain said as I was bound
To go for seven years".

There was very little love-making in these ditties; indeed, in the only one that partly touched on this topic there was a most ungallant reference to the maids of merry England. It ran somewhat in this fashion:

"It was a lass of Coventry,
As fair as fair could be;
And on a Sunday evening
She walked along o' me;
I asked her then, she gave consent,
She was as good as gold;
How little did I ever think
That she should grow so cold!

'Now, Jane, fulfil your promise,
The promise you gave me,
Or I will turn a sailor,
And sail away to sea;'
'O Tom,' she said, a-crying,
'My heart will burst in two,
For I love Jim the carpenter
As once I did love you.

"Now all you gay young mariners
That sail upon the main,
I pray you keep yourselves abroad,
And ne'er come home again;
From port to port you'll meet with girls
That are both kind and free;
But the girls of this Old England
They'll ne'er get hold o' me."

The door of the saloon is opened, and a dark, small figure appears against the dull glow.

"Peggy," says Queen Tita (who has been at the forward window, vainly peering out into the blackness), "isn't this dreadful? I can see no sign of anything; and the boat will be smashed to bits before we get out. Can *you* see anything?"

"Nothing but the two small lights in the distance—two lamps, I suppose. I'm afraid we're not near the end yet."

"But the tunnel is only a mile and a half long: even with this crawling we should be through in three-quarters of an hour at the most."

"I'm afraid we haven't been in the tunnel anything like that," says Miss Peggy; and she is right.

"May I come up beside you?"

"Oh, no, please don't!" the girl says at once. "I can't see where the board is: you might slip. I dare not move hand or foot."

"I hope it will be my last experience of the kind," the other says, with some decision, and she goes back into the saloon to stare anxiously through the window-pane.

And still our unknown friend with the high and nasal voice pours out his artless narratives, one after the other. When he ceases there is a dead silence; no one attempts to interfere or help; perhaps this performance of his is acknowledged and has brought him fame among the bargemen of the west. Nor does he ever relapse into the comic vein. Life has been serious for these young men of whom he sings. Hard work, poor wages, tyrannical masters, and the temptations of drink in sea-port towns have wrought them many woes. And yet they do not complain over much; it is the hand of fate that has been

against them; they relate their experiences as a warning or as a consolation to others in similar plight. Indeed, we were highly pleased with these simple ditties—thinking, as we may have done, of the ghastly facetiousness, the cynicism, the knowingness, that delight the gin-sodden London music-haller.

And so we fought our way through this echoing and interminable cavern, striving to steer a middle passage between those walls that seemed to tear at the side of the boat as with demon claws; and ever we were looking forward for the small spot of light that would tell us of the near-coming of the outer world. It was Miss Peggy who caught sight of it first.

"There it is!—look!" she cried.

Then one could make out—apparently at a great distance away—a sort of miniature bull's eye, of a dullish hue, that disappeared now and again behind clouds of smoke; but ever, as we glided or grated along, it was growing larger and larger; and the saffron hue that it showed was becoming more and more strangely luminous, so that the two lamps we had been following for so long had become invisible. And now we can make out an archway filled with a confused yellow light; the black barges are sailing towards it and through it; sometimes a bronze-hued smoke obscures the opening, and again there is a golden glare; finally—but with eyes dazed with the sudden splendour of colour—we sail out into the placid beauty of this bit of Worcestershire scenery—the green wooded banks, the brown water, and the overhanging trees all warm in the light of the afternoon sky; and the candles, ineffectual and unheeded, still burning in the now forsaken saloon.

"Well," says Queen Tita, with a sigh of relief, "now that we have come safely through, I'm glad we have done it."

Miss Peggy comports herself more bravely.

"I'd do it again to-morrow!" she says.

"Then you shall," one answers her.

"What do you mean?" she says—just a little taken aback.

"To-morrow we have two more tunnels to go through."

"Oh, indeed," she says. "But perhaps they are simpler ones, where we can push the boat through by ourselves?"

"Certainly not; we shall have to be towed through by a steamer."

"Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, maliciously, "'when I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married'."

"Come on, a hundred tunnels!" says Miss Peggy, laughing. "Do you think I am afraid of them? But I confess that it is a good deal nicer to be out here in the warm air."

That, however, was not precisely the question that was concerning the more responsible members of this travelling party. On overhauling the Nameless Barge with such carefulness as was possible, we found that apparently she had sustained no serious damage during her subterranean voyage, although she bore abundant marks of ill-usage that did not improve her appearance. On raising the stern-sheets—which was the readiest way of ascertaining what water was in her—it was discovered that there had been no unusual leakage; so that we hoped she had suffered nothing but what could be put right by a little mending and scrubbing, and a coat of paint. We were therefore free to continue our voyage in peace.

And peaceful indeed, and very beautiful, was that afternoon's sail. In this neighbourhood the canal winds along a high embankment, formed on the side of a hill; and there were wide views over the far-stretching and undulating landscape—the deep valleys near us inclosed by distant cultivated slopes, here and there crowned by a bit of wood. The evening was mellow and golden; we had allowed the barges to get away ahead of us, so that we were once more by ourselves; after the rough-and-tumble work of the day, we were glad to resume our quiet gliding through the silent and shining country. When it became a question of halting for the night, it mattered little to us where we moored; we were once more quite alone. Captain Columbus hinted that there was a small place not far off, called Alvechurch, where he could get stabling and also accommodation for himself and the Horse-Marine; and so we assented; and chose out a part of the bank where there were some bushes; and soon the Nameless Barge was again at rest.

After dinner that evening Mrs. Threepenny-bit must needs have Peggy bring out her banjo, which had remained in its case since our leaving Stratford-on-Avon. Miss Peggy seemed a little loth. When Colonel Cameron joined in the request, that did not improve matters much—rather the contrary, as it appeared to us. And yet she was persuaded in the end; and she went and got the banjo; and then, with a timidity we had never seen her exhibit (this was not like our Peggy at all!), she began and sang the old familiar and simple "Mary Blane"; and very well she sang it too—notwithstanding her shyness—with her rich contralto voice. Colonel Cameron seemed a little surprised. He had not heard our Peggy sing before. And certainly there was something in the quality of her singing a little finer than the shrill and nasal tones that had rung along the hollow-sounding underworld through which we had passed; though even now that experience seemed so recent that we could almost hear the high and plaintive drawl—

"Now all you gay young mariners
That sail upon the main,
I pray you keep yourselves abroad,
And ne'er come home again;
From port to port you'll meet with girls
That are both kind and free;
But the girls of this Old England
They'll ne'er get hold o' me".

That was interesting in its way; and indeed we were grateful to the unknown young Orpheus for enlivening our black voyage; but we preferred to be among the silences once more; entirely by ourselves in this floating little home; with the cheerful lamps lit, and cigars and things; and with Peggy—her voice deep-throated as a nightingale's—to lend another charm to the last lingering half-hours together, ere we parted for the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

"But who the melodies of morn can tell?
The wild brook babbling down the mountain-side;
The lowing herd; the sheepfold's simple bell;
The pipe of early shepherd dim descried
In the lone valley; echoing far and wide
The clamorous horn along the cliffs above;
The hollow murmur of the ocean-tide;
The hum of bees, the linnet's lay of love,
And the full choir that wakes the universal grove."

THIS is a Sunday morning, still and beautiful, the sunlight lying warmly over the wide Worcestershire landscape, with its far-stretching valleys and copse-crowned hills, its smiling farms, and mansions half-hidden among woods. The perfect silence is hardly lessened, rather it seems heightened, by the universal singing of the birds—a multitudinous and joyous din that almost drowns the velvet-soft note of the cuckoo. If Warwickshire chiefly struck us by its sylvan luxuriance, surely we must give pre-eminence to this county of Worcester in the matter of bird-music; and well it fits with the pleasant morning, and the peaceful country-side, and the prevailing stillness, which, as far as we can hear, is not as yet broken by any sound of a church-bell. And then, as we are listening, there comes a human voice into this domain—a startling thing, for we have grown accustomed to be the sole possessors of these solitudes—and this is a stranger's voice we hear in the distance, singing in a high, and wavering, and plaintive key. Then we behold the first of a long string of barges. The music draws nearer. We can make out phrases—*In the sweet . . . boi and boi . . . we shall meet on that beautiful shore. . . . In the sweet . . . boi and boi . . . we shall meet on that beautiful shore.* But as the first of the barges comes along, the young man who is singing and steering at the same time becomes mute; he glances

with a veiled wonder at this nondescript boat moored in among the bushes; and then he is carried on. The people in the other barges also stare a little, in silence. They are very quiet this morning. Perhaps they have been up at an early hour. Or perhaps their somnolent way of life has sunk into their souls. They regard us with a blank look as they pass, and then return to their monotonous task of watching the prow of their boat, with their hand or arm on the tiller.

"Good morning!" says Miss Peggy, coming out into the white light with her cheeks fresh-tinted as the rose, and her speedwell-blue eyes shining. "This *is* a surprise! I made sure it was raining hard—there was such a pattering on the roof ——"

"And didn't you know what the pattering was?"

"Since it wasn't rain, I suppose it was rats."

"Not at all. It was birds. They were hopping about in search of crumbs among all that rubbish that we scraped off in the tunnel. Murdoch must get a brush and sweep the roof it isn't like him to be so neglectful."

"I know why," she says. "He can hardly take his eyes off Colonel Cameron; and he listens to no one else. I suppose Colonel Cameron is a great hero in Murdoch's eyes?"

"Well, you see, the Highlanders have a strong regard for these old families, although the clans and clanship have long been abolished. There isn't much that a Highlander wouldn't do for Lochiel, or Cluny, or Lord Lovat, or some of those. And then, when any representative of these well-known families distinguishes himself, of course the Highlanders are very proud of him, and don't make too little of his exploits. At the same time, you must remember that Ewen Cameron's name is known —slightly—to other people besides the Highlanders."

"I think he is almost too gentle for a soldier; don't you?" she says. "No; I won't say that; for I like him so much; and I'm not the least bit afraid of him now. Yes, I like him very much indeed; and that's honest now; and I don't see how anyone can help liking him. He is so considerate. Do you notice how he never forgets to say something to Murdoch

in Gaelic when they meet for the first time in the morning? It is a little thing, but I think it is very nice of him. I consider him to be just a type of what a perfect gentleman should be in manners—I mean, he is nearer my idea of that than anyone I have ever met. He is so natural; and so very kind to you without making any pretence about it; and never anything is done for display; and then he never worries you with attentions; perhaps it's rather the other way—perhaps he is a little stand-offish; but, then, you know he has lived so long among the English and their airs of indifference. Well, I like even that in his manner. There is a kind of proud simplicity about him, that is so different from—well, from the kind of mock gallantry that young men think so fine. Oh, I wish girls could talk!"

"Can't they?"

"I wish they were allowed to speak their minds—some people would be surprised! Why, they'll come to you—a perfect stranger—and they'll profess to be so complaisant, and give themselves such fascinating airs, and pretend to be charmed, too, by your superior accomplishments; and they think you're such a fool as not to see through it all! And of course a girl can't say, 'Oh, go away and don't make an ass of yourself!'"

"It certainly would not be usual for a well brought-up young lady to speak in that way."

"It's only their vanity!" continues Miss Peggy, with contemptuous vehemence. "And what they say to you they say to the next, and to the next dozen, and to the next hundred; and they think that girls are so simple as not to know. Well, we're simple enough, but we've ceased to be infants, I suppose ——"

How far her indignation might have carried her it is impossible to guess; but at this moment the door was again opened, and out came a tall figure with another "Good morning!" while Miss Peggy was instantly struck silent, and *that* with some obvious embarrassment. She even flushed *slightly; and to* cover her not quite intelligible confusion one *had to say* quickly—

"Here is Miss Rosslyn, Cameron, who wants to know all about the Highland clans, and the clansmen, and their relations to the chiefs. And about the '45 rising, too; she is to be made a partisan of Prince Charlie; she must be turned into a Jacobite if there's going to be any peace and quietude on board this boat. And who can do that better than yourself?"

"Oh, no," he said, with a smile, "no, no, no; all that is past and gone now. Chiefs and clansmen are alike loyal now-a-days; we are the Queen's 'loyal Highlanders,' and proud to wear the title."

"Yes; but don't you understand," one says to him, "how interesting it must be to an ingenuous young student from America—where all the institutions and habits and customs are comparatively new—to hear of this very old-world state of society; yes, and to hear of it from one related to the people who were 'out' in the '45?"

"Well, when you think of it," says Inverfask (for Miss Peggy has not a word to say for herself, having been in some mysterious kind of way "caught"), "it does seem strange that the clan system was actually in existence in the last century, and within a couple of days' ride—or a single day's ride, you might almost say—from the city of Edinburgh. And very little the good people of Edinburgh knew about the Highlanders and their ways. I suppose you never heard the story of what happened to Lord Kilmarnock at Falkirk—it is in Chambers' 'History of the Rebellion'—and you should get that book, Miss Rosslyn, if you are at all curious to know about that time: Lord Kilmarnock had raised a troop of horse for the Prince, and had been with him all through the expedition into England, and all through the retreat, and so must have got some knowledge of the clansmen and their customs. But what happened at Falkirk no doubt puzzled him. The day after the battle, the Prince and he were looking down from the window of a house in the town, and to their surprise they saw a soldier coming along in the English uniform, and wearing a black cockade in his hat ——"

"Peggy," interposes a small person, who has insinuated

herself into this group after a brief "Good-morning" all round, "of course you know that the white cockade was the Stuart badge:

> "'There grows a bonny brier-bush in our kail-yard,
> And white are the blossoms o't in our kail-yard'".

"Their first impression," our Colonel resumes, "was that this straggler might perhaps be some hare-brained adventurer who had come along intending to shoot at the Prince; however, Lord Kilmarnock immediately went downstairs and into the street, went up to the man, struck off his hat, and put his foot on the black cockade. The next moment one of the Highlanders standing by had rushed on Lord Kilmarnock and shoved him away; Kilmarnock instantly pulled out his pistol and presented it at his assailant; the Highlander drew his dirk; and goodness only knows what would have happened if a number of the Highlander's companions had not interposed on behalf of their comrade, and driven Lord Kilmarnock off. And what was it all about? Why, the man with the black cockade was a Cameron who had been in an English regiment, and who, of course, deserted to join the standard of his chief as soon as he got the chance; and, being a Cameron, the other Camerons standing around would not have him interfered with by anyone, whatever his rank. This was a matter for the clan and the chief of the clan with which no outsider could intermeddle. 'No one in the Prince's army,' they said, 'had the right to take the cockade out of the man's hat except Lochiel himself.' And if the Edinburgh and Glasgow people," Inverfask continued (seeing that Miss Peggy was an attentive listener), "were afraid of those wild folks from the hills, you may imagine what the English villagers thought of them. That must have been an odd experience for Lochiel—'the gentle Lochiel' they called him in the North—when he went into the lodgings assigned him—somewhere in England it was—and found his landlady on her knees before him entreating him to *take* her life, but spare her two little children. I suppose he *did not look* much of an ogre; for when he told her he did *not mean to* harm anyone, she answered that it was the general

belief that the Highlanders made small children a common article of food. Then, when he still further reassured her, she called aloud, 'Come out, children, the gentleman will not eat you'; and the trembling creatures came out of a clothes-press where they had been hidden. Indeed, the bulk of those Highlanders must have looked like savages to the English people, accustomed to their trim soldiers. Their very weapons were the weapons of savages ——"

Here Murdoch's bell tinkled, and we had all to troop in to the little breakfast-table in the saloon; but now that Queen Tita had found Colonel Cameron willing to improve and inform the mind of her young American friend, she was not going to let him abandon the task.

"I'm afraid, Sir Ewen," she said, "you'll have to give Peggy a good deal of information; she has never been through the hall at Inverfask, you know."

"Well," he said, "isn't it odd to think that only in the last century our own countrymen were going into battle with a target made of wood and bull's hide, and studded with brass nails, on their left arm, to protect them? It is hardly to be wondered at that the English were bewildered by the manner of fighting of those wild Highlanders. This was what they did—if Miss Rosslyn cares to know. The front rank was composed almost entirely of gentlemen—connected by blood with the chief, that is—and they were armed with the leather target, a musket, a claymore, pistols, and dirk; the rear rank had any kind of weapon they could lay their hand on—sometimes a scythe or a sickle attached to a pole. When the line charged the Highlanders rushed forward until they were quite at close quarters; fired their muskets and threw them away; drew their claymores and again rushed forward, receiving the bayonets of the enemy on their targets, that almost entirely covered them; then they twisted aside the bayonet-point fixed in the target and found the helpless English soldier at their mercy. The fury of this first onslaught is said on all hands to have been incredible: why, at Culloden, there was one of the Mackintoshes—John Mor Macgilvray, I think, was his name—

hewed his way into the English lines a gunshot past the cannons, and he had a dozen men lying killed around him before they could get him dispatched. Well, that was not the reason that made Macdonald of Keppoch keep up a hopeless struggle, when everything was lost. You remember, the Macdonalds were mortally offended because at Culloden they were given the left of the line, whereas they had always fought on the right; the consequence was, they refused to move; they stood the enemy's fire with the greatest coolness and courage; but nothing could induce them to charge; and, at last, with the general retreat, they turned also and fled. When Keppoch saw that he cried aloud, 'My God, have the children of my tribe forsaken me?'—doesn't it sound like something you have read of in the Old Testament?—and he rushed forward, alone, to certain death. He fell wounded; and even then some of his followers tried to get him to leave the field; but no; he went forward again; received another shot, and fell dead. And well it was," continued Inverfask in a lower voice, and with a darker light in his eye, "that he fell *dead*. He might have lain on the field that night, and the next day, too, until it pleased the Butcher to send out his platoons of musketry in order to put the wounded out of their pain. I believe that was his phrase."

Then he seemed to reflect that this was rather a gloomy subject for a bright and cheerful Sunday morning in Worcestershire; and he began to talk to his hostess about the use of these old claymores and cavalry pistols and dirks in the way of decoration and to warn her against the sham targets manufactured—dints and all—in Edinburgh for the embellishment of hotel smoking-rooms and the halls of rich Glasgow merchants.

"But, Colonel Cameron," said Miss Peggy, harking back, "are the Highlanders of the present day—are your Highland soldiers—anything like those clansmen who followed Charles Edward into England?"

"Well," he said, with a smile, "you wouldn't find much *outward* likeness between a Highland regiment of to-day and *the men* who came down from the hills with Clanranald and Glengarry and the rest of them. But our present Highlanders

have inherited a good many of their qualities—for you don't change the instincts of a race in a century and a half. As all the world knows, they are brave—what the Highland regiments have done in the British army would be a long story to tell; they are immensely proud of their nationality; they are warmly devoted to such officers as they like; and they need to be humoured a little. Colin Campbell never did a more astute thing in his life than when he announced to the Forty-second, the Ninety-third, and the Seventy-ninth—just after they had won the heights of Alma—that he meant to ask the Commander-in-chief for permission to wear the Highland bonnet during the rest of the campaign. It was an adroit compliment; he himself wrote home how pleased the men were. And I have no doubt that the one occasional defect of the Highland soldier—his impetuosity—his anxiety to come to close quarters and carry everything with a rush—is inherited from the clansmen. You remember how Sir Colin had to roar at the Ninety-third when they went forward at Balaclava—'Ninety-third, Ninety-third, damn all that eagerness! Well, he had no reason to complain of their want of steadiness when they were at length formed in position: the 'thin red line,' and how it withstood the charge of the Russian cavalry, and broke them, and hurled them back, will not be forgotten soon, I think. Indeed, Sir Colin must have had a fair amount of confidence in his Highlanders when he did not form them into square to receive that tremendous charge; they were not even in fours; they were only two deep; and everyone, Dr. Ansell wrote at the time, stopped, breathless, to watch the 'bursting of the wave upon the line of Gaelic rock'. I'm afraid the clansmen could not have withstood a charge like that," continues Colonel Cameron—addressing himself mainly to the young American lady, who, strangely enough, seems a hundred times more interested in hearing of these deeds of blood and battle than in listening to Jack Duncombe's literary disquisitions and his cursing of the critics. "No, the first rush was everything with them. Prestonpans—where they first met the English, as you know—was *the work of* a few minutes, so headlong was their assault.

Lochiel told his followers to strike at the noses of the horses, so as to produce confusion in the English ranks; but they never got the chance; the dragoons bolted straight away."

"'They a' ran awa', ran awa', frae the hundred pipers and a' and a'!'" says our twopenny-halfpenny Jacobite at the head of the table; and at the same moment Captain Columbus makes his appearance without; and presently Murdoch is standing at the door of the saloon, awaiting orders.

Now, this being Sunday, Queen Tita would rather have given our gay young mariners and their diligent horse a rest; but, as appeared from our captain's report, there were ominous rumours abroad among the canal-folk of intended repairs somewhere or other; and he himself was distinctly of opinion that we should at least push forward and get through the two tunnels. So we assented to that; poled the boat across to the tow-path; had the line affixed to the harness; and were once more gliding along.

But when we came to the first of the tunnels, we found we had just missed the steam-launch, which had disappeared with its long convoy into that black hole in the earth; and as there was now a considerable time for us to wait, we all got ashore, and proceeded to explore the neighbouring wood, which is known as Shortwood Dingle. And a very picturesque wood this turned out to be—here and there showing wide clearances, where the trees had been felled, here and there dipping down into a deep hollow, where one could hardly get through the tangled bushes. And we had not been strolling very far when we discovered that we had come into the land of which the poets fable. The wild-flowers were all wrong. We had noticed in the Warwickshire woods a kind of tendency on the part of Nature to jumble up the times and seasons; but that was nothing to the anachronisms we encountered here. We remembered charges we had brought against Milton, Shakespeare, Burns (Burns, curiously enough, is never wrong in his poetry —*it is* when he is writing inflated prose that he trips up), and *others;* and we were filled with remorse of conscience. For *in these* open spaces between the felled stumps, and in the

glades between the bushes, and down in the moist dells, amid all the profusion of bloom, the customary dates of the coming and going of the earlier wild-flowers of the year seemed to have been quite disregarded. Here, for example, were scattered patches of the red campion (*Lychnis diurna*), which, properly speaking, is a June and July flower. There, between the trees, were sheets of the wild hyacinth, making a blue as of the sky overhead. Everywhere, among the dank grass, were pale yellow clusters of primroses; and the primrose is usually held to be an April visitant (we were now well on in May), though the present writer has occasionally found an odd specimen as late as August. However, the matter of times and seasons bothered us little; here was a rare abundance of blossoms: the white stars of the stitchwort (*Stellaria Holostea*); the tender-hued, yellow dead-nettle; the darker coloured cowslip; the purple self-heal; the modest violet among its smooth, dark leaves; the bright little flower of the wild strawberry, and many another old familiar friend. For the rest, we found this Shortwood Dingle rather a dampish place; but even in the deeper hollows the crude greens of the early summer were tempered by the russets and browns of the fallen oak-leaves; and the sunlight striking down here and there spread a soft radiance around.

Miss Peggy was busy. She said the sconces in the saloon had never been properly decorated. Now she would have one entirely surrounded with cowslips, another with wild hyacinths, another with yellow dead-nettle, the fourth with red campion, while an indiscriminate mass of blossoms might adorn the table. Mrs. Threepenny-bit wanted to know (as if anybody could tell her) why Shakespeare, among all his references to wild-flowers, never mentions the hyacinth or blue-bell, though it must be much more common in these parts (this was her contention) than the "azure hare-bell" that was to strew the grave of Imogen. Colonel Cameron, when he was not talking to the women, was chiefly on the outlook for pheasants—of which we saw none. And so we wandered along through this picturesque dingle, and up to a height from which there is a wide view over the adjacent country, and eventually back to

the canal, where there were now several boats besides our own awaiting the arrival of the steam-launch.

When that far from gay vessel arrived, we were all waterproofed and ready for the ordeal—all except Mrs. Threepennybit, who preferred to sit by herself in the saloon, awaiting events, and consoling herself with the reflection that these two Tardebigg tunnels were shorter than the West Hill one. Shorter we found them; but also much darker—indeed, absolutely dark; for the bargemen did not seem to consider it necessary to light their lamps on this occasion. Accordingly, one had to steer by touch—that is to say, by the scraping of the boat on one or the other side of the tunnel; and as the second of these subterranean ways is hewn out of solid rock, the poor Nameless Barge suffered many a rude knock in her laborious passage. But Miss Peggy had grown quite fearless now. She begged to be allowed to steer—a request that was instantly and distinctly refused; for we did not want to be drowned like rats in a drain. She even, in a quite unconcerned way (to judge by her tone, for one could not get even a glimmering outline of her) returned to the subject of the Highland regiments and the surviving traces of clanship and comradeship—as if one could listen to the idle chatter of this long-limbed school-girl while piloting a valuable argosy through unknown deeps. So we scraped and tore our way along first the one tunnel, and then, with an interval of smooth sailing in the white day, through its rock-hewn successor; until, ahead of us in the dark, there grew up and waxed brighter and brighter a sort of fuliginous, confused, opalescent glare; then finally we plunged into that bewildering glory—bronze-hued or saffron-hued it appeared as we approached it—and suddenly emerged into a sunlit greenness of foliage and the quietude of the outer world.

"How many more of these tunnels shall we have to go through?" asks Queen Tita; and it would seem that the more *she sees* of them the less she likes them.

"*Not* another one; that is the last. The next possible danger we have to face is going down the Severn; and I dare

say we shall be able to manage somehow. 'We'll warsle through.'"

"Oh, I don't mind what it is—so long as there is daylight," she says; and then she adds—looking back to the low archway of the tunnel—"but I confess I am not anxious for any more experiences of *that* kind."

"But just think of the story you will have to tell when you go back to London!" says Miss Peggy, putting her arm round her friend's neck for a moment, as she is passing along to her cabin, to get the sand and wet out of her pretty brown hair.

This was a strange sort of afternoon. We were now at a very considerable elevation, and could overlook a vast extent of country stretching away on both sides of us; but there was a pale mist lying over the land, with which the faint sunlight was ineffectually struggling; and here and there, indeed, the far wooded heights seemed to rise out of a sea of white fog. The map informed us of the hilly nature of the neighbourhood—Shadow Hill, Turret Hill, Breakneck Hill, Hill-top, and so on; but all that we could make out was a ghostly kind of landscape looming through the grey vapour; sometimes catching a pale yellow tone from a shaft of sunlight, sometimes showing darker ridges of trees, high in air, rising out of the formless chaos in the valleys beneath. It was grievous that we should thus be cheated out of the wide prospect; but in any case we had soon to descend from our lofty position; we came to a series of no fewer than six-and thirty locks; and working our way laboriously down through these, we found ourselves close to Stoke Prior. It only remains to be noted that, just as we reached the foot of that long flight of steps and stairs, Mrs. Threepenny-bit and Miss Peggy, who happened to be in the saloon together, made a remarkable discovery. They discovered that the glass had risen very considerably. This was such joyous news that they must needs come rushing forth to proclaim it. And, apparently, it gave them so much pleasure that it was not worth while informing the innocent young things that the aneroid had risen, not to announce any change in the weather, but *simply* because we had descended from the heights to the plain.

It was a social afternoon, too. We had an abundance of visitors. The people belonging to the chemical works near Stoke had come out for their Sunday evening stroll—they and their families—and the banks of the canal seemed to be their favourite promenade. We were so fortunate as to be able to afford them quite a novel excitement and cause of wonder; and the curiosity with which they examined the boat, and the inmates of the boat, and tried to get glimpses of the interior of the saloon, was of the most open and simple and ingenuous kind.

"They look as if they would like very much to be invited on board," Queen Tita said.

"If we stop anywhere, I shall try to get some of the children on board," Inverfask made answer. "It will be a raree-show for them to remember for years."

And he was as good as his word—or tried to be. A bridge stopped us for a minute or two; and there happened to be a number of small folk on the bank, both boys and girls. But they were not to be enticed. He wheedled and coaxed—Miss Peggy helping him—without avail; either they stared with stolid eyes or grinned and hung back. On the other hand, two bland and healthy-cheeked young rustics, of about eighteen or twenty, informed us that they had to tramp that night all the way to Worcester, and were so kind as to offer us their society for as far as we might be going. We were obliged to decline that amiable proposal. And so—gradually leaving behind us the last twos and threes of that vagrant population—we sailed smoothly on by Summer Hill, and Hadsor, and Dunhamstead, and Oddingley; while the grey mists around us deepened, and the dusk came over the voiceless land.

We were at length forced to call a halt, and ask Captain Columbus if he had any idea where he was going to put up for the night. He said he had not. On consulting the map, we found the only place with a name in this neighbourhood was called Tibberton; and we advised him and the Horse-Marine *to go in quest* of it, before it became quite dark. Accordingly, *off they went*, leaving us to our solitude; and we were not sorry

when all the lamps and candles were lit in the saloon, shutting out those pale swathes of mist, and shining cheerfully on the white cloth of the dinner table, now gay with the Shortwood Dingle flowers.

And then it was—at dinner—that Queen Tita skilfully drew our Colonel on to talk about Inverfask House, and the trophies in the hall there, and 1745, and kindred matters; and this he did freely enough; for these were not his own exploits or experiences he was asked to speak about; and he could not but see that the young American lady was very much interested.

"And naturally it is interesting to you," he said to her, "for America has never come through any such phase of civilisation; and it is indeed a survival of a state of society unknown anywhere else in Europe. That is why I think we ought to have some great historical picture to preserve its appearance for us. Perhaps there is some such thing; I don't know; I have been so much abroad that I am not familiar with the public galleries; but there ought to be such a picture—in Edinburgh, for example. I don't mean mere incidents in the Jacobite rebellions; but a general picture of the Highland army—say, as it appeared on the morning of the battle of Prestonpans. Don't you think it would be very striking? I mean just before the battle began, when the sun rolled away the mist, showing the Highland lines—the gentlemen in the front rank, with targets and claymores and dirks; about the middle of the line, the chief of the clan and his immediate kinsmen; the rear rank made up of his half-armed followers—unkempt, wild-haired, wiry-looking men from the hills, many of them bare-legged and bare-footed from the long marching. It was just before the charge that the whole mass of them removed their bonnets, and offered up a short prayer: wouldn't that make a striking scene for a painter?"

"And who led the charge, Peggy? And who first sent the English dragoons flying? It was the clan Cameron!" interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a kind of triumph; and a very pretty speech it was—for an Englishwoman to make.

"I wonder," continued our Colonel, "if anyone has ever

painted the meeting of Prince Charlie with the Seven Men of Glenmorriston—that is a very picturesque incident, now!"

"Who were they?" Miss Peggy asked at once.

"Well, if you are at all interested in the story of the Prince's wanderings—and it *is* an interesting story—I hope you will allow me to send you the *Journal of the Miraculous Escape of the Young Chevalier*," said he. "It has been reprinted; I will send you a copy of the little book ——"

"Oh, thank you very much," said she, dutifully. "But who were the men you spoke of?"

"Sometimes," said this most amiable of historians, to his intensely interested audience of two—two crazy women, that is to say—"sometimes they are described as noted thieves and robbers, who lived in a cave in the mountains, subsisting on such plunder as they could get; but I believe the truth is they were simply a small band of men who had been in the Prince's army and who had been grievously ill-treated by the English—despoiled of everything they possessed—and had retired to these wilds, swearing an oath to be revenged on the Government troops and all their allies. However that may be, starvation compelled the Prince to throw himself on the mercy of these outlaws. He and his attendants had been wandering among the hills for forty-eight hours without food of any kind; they had no means of communicating with Lochiel or any of the others who were also skulking in the mountains; and as a last resource, Glenaladale—or his brother, I forget which—advised that they should seek out those men in the cave. That must have been a striking incident, don't you think, when the Prince, all ragged and emaciated with his sufferings, was brought into the den in the rocks, where those half-savage fellows—who couldn't talk a word of English—had secreted themselves. Glenaladale introduced the Prince to them as young Clanranald; but they recognised him at once; and constituted themselves his bodyguard, swearing an oath, in Gaelic, to be faithful to him——"

"And mind you, Peggy," Queen Tita again interposes (so *wild is she* about these Highland folk), "mind you, Peggy, any *one of those* poor wretches could at any moment, and without

any danger or trouble, have gone to the nearest military station and claimed £30,000 for telling where the Prince was."

"Chambers says," continues Colonel Cameron—and of course it is chiefly for Miss Peggy's edification that he is recalling these old stories—"that those poor fellows kept their oath so well that they never mentioned the Prince's name until a twelvemonth after he had escaped to France. And when he, on first trusting his safety to them, proposed that Glenaladale and himself should also take an oath of fidelity towards them, pledging every one of the party to stand by the others to the last, they said no; they did not require that."

"And yet they say that a Prince who could inspire such heroic devotion was a contemptible person!" the smaller woman exclaimed, with proud lips.

"A contemptible person he was not," said Cameron, gravely. "He had the stuff in him of a capable soldier; and it was a grievous misfortune he was ever led away by promises from the French Court to attempt an enterprise that cost many a brave man his life and ruined many a family. I suppose claimants for thrones don't take such things into account. Anyway, it would have been a bad day for both England and Scotland if he had succeeded; everyone knows that; and everyone may acknowledge as much and yet admit that Charles Edward was an able and intrepid soldier, a generous and high-spirited companion—even in the worst of his troubles —and a gallant Prince. It is conceded by everyone who came in contact with him—from the chiefs of the clans who ventured their fortunes for him to the poor wretched islanders who perilled their lives for him, and who, years and years after, could never hear his name mentioned without tears rushing into their eyes. That is not the kind of enthusiasm and strong and devoted affection that is awakened by any contemptible person."

Queen Tita seemed very happy all the rest of this evening; and was most effusively kind to Colonel Cameron; and she said that, if Miss Rosslyn should happen to be in the Highlands with us that autumn, she hoped he would allow these

two to pay a visit—in his absence, of course—to Inverfask House, so that Miss Rosslyn should see the hall and its contents. Colonel Cameron answered that to invite anyone to visit a house with the owner of it absent was not what was generally considered a Highland welcome; and, if he only knew about what time these two friends were likely to be in the neighbourhood of Inverfask, it would be hard if he could not find a few days in which to go north to receive them. And Miss Peggy seemed mightily pleased, too—but whether it was at the notion of inspecting Inverfask House, or from some other cause, one could not definitely say.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Now he goes on, and sings of fairs and shows,
For still new fairs before his eyes arose.
How pedlars' stalls with glittering toys are laid,
The various fairings of the country maid.
Long silken laces hang upon the twine,
And rows of pins and amber bracelets shine;
How the tight lass knives, combs, and scissors spies,
And looks on thimbles with desiring eyes.
Of lotteries next with tuneful note he told,
Where silver spoons are won, and rings of gold.
The lads and lasses trudge the street along,
And all the fair is crowded in his song."

NEXT morning our women-folk, though they did not say much, betrayed quite a remarkable eagerness and animation; and we could guess the cause; for we had discovered by the map that we were not more than half-a-dozen miles from Worcester; and no doubt such imagination as Heaven had vouchsafed to these two creatures was already running riot in shops and purchases. And yet it seemed hard to believe that we were in the immediate neighbourhood of a great and ancient city, whose story told of sieges and fires and massacres, whose streets had resounded with the din of battle and the shouts of victorious hosts. Here, in a kind of dreamlike haze of sunlight, lay quiet fields and meadows; the elms and the hawthorns scarcely stirred a leaf; the only living thing we could see was a pheasant stalking warily through the long grass and eyeing us from time to time —his plumage a blaze amongst the green. Then there were the yellow waters of the canal; a small red bridge in the distance; some further groups of trees; that was all. Not a sound anywhere—even the birds had forsaken us.

"Yes, Miss Peggy," one says to the young lady, when we are all assembled at breakfast, "you must scold Captain *Columbus* for being late. It is easy to understand why you

are anxious to push on. We know what your head is full of at this moment. Shops—gloves—laces—white-rose scent—and things of that kind? No, no. You are a daughter of the Great Republic of the West; and, of course, you are anxious to see the scene of Cromwell's last battle—the 'crowning mercy' that established the Commonwealth ——"

"Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with innocent eyes, "you haven't been studying English history for some time back—I was quite forgetting ——"

"Oh, you hold your tongue!" one continues. "There is only one period of history that is of any importance in your eyes. You see everything from an angle of '45 degrees—1745, I mean; nothing else has any interest for you. But you, Miss Peggy: well, we will show you the cathedral-tower where Charles II. and his Council of War stood and watched Fleetwood building his bridge of boats across the Severn; and we will show you the spot where the Lord-General massed his forces, bringing them along by Stratford-on-Avon and Evesham and Pershore ——"

"Was Cromwell ever at Stratford-on-Avon?" she says quickly—as if that were a very curious circumstance.

"Certainly. And we will show you where Fleetwood crossed the Teme, and drove the Scotch, fighting hard, back into the suburbs of the town; and where Cromwell, on the other side of the Severn, had to give way for a time before the final charge."

"Is there a theatre in Worcester?" asks Queen Tita, with shocking irrelevance; the fate of Charles II. is as nothing to her; that is not the one of the Stuart family who enlists her sympathy.

"There is."

"Then we must take Peggy; she has never been to a provincial theatre in England; and her education can't be completed without that. Then I mean to send a telegram to Bell, just to remind her of old times; how strange it will be to be in Worcester again!"

"And I shall have a whole heap of letters, I know," said *Miss Peggy.*

"*And I* am trying to make myself believe that I shall find

a box of cigars packed among my things that are coming from Aldershot," observed our Colonel, somewhat wistfully; so that it will be seen there was a plentiful variety of reasons why we should gird a little at Captain Columbus being late.

But when that trustworthy functionary appeared, the delay was easily explained. It turned out that Tibberton had entirely declined to shelter them for the night. No lodging of any kind or description could be found, either there or in the surrounding neighbourhood. So they had come wandering back to the canal; and at last they had met with a most hospitable lock-keeper, who not only offered them the use of his parlour for the night, but was so kind as to provide them with a modest supper, and, moreover, showed them some kind of shed or another where they could put up the horse. We began to wonder how many centuries ago it was that Tibberton received its name of "the holy town"; and whether it was a resort of pious pilgrims, and a populous and famous place; and why it had so completely and lamentably fallen away from its high fortunes: in the midst of which aimless speculations Captain Columbus had once more attached our motive power, and presently we were smoothly gliding onwards and towards the city of Worcester.

Now it soon became apparent that Colonel Cameron had not forgotten the proposal of the previous evening that Miss Peggy and her friend should pay a visit to Inverfask that autumn; on the contrary, it seemed to have a kind of fascination for him; he returned to it again and again, and always on the assumption that it was an accepted engagement.

"I only wish you could remain there long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with the people," said he to the young lady, as she was considerately helping to steer the boat with her bronze-slippered foot on the tiller. "They may have their faults ——"

"But which, Sir Ewen?" interposed Queen Tita, promptly: the notion that her beloved Highland folk could have any faults seemed to startle her.

"Well," said he, rather evasively, "for one thing, I think

they are a little apt to tell you what they imagine will please you—rather than be strictly accurate ——"

"Indeed, then, I don't find much to object to in an excess of courtesy!" she said at once. "It is a good deal preferable to boorishness. Most other people wouldn't take the trouble to make things pleasant for you. I'm afraid, Sir Ewen, you will have to find some other fault with my Highlanders!"

"But I was going to tell Miss Rosslyn what was certainly *not* one of their faults," said he, "and that is ingratitude. If a lady lives among them, and is a little kind to them—friendly in her manner, I mean—it is wonderful the affection they will show towards her, and the pride they will take in doing her little services. And then there's another thing: they are the only peasantry I have ever met with who have the knack of saying pretty and nice things; the rudest of them ——"

"But, Sir Ewen, there are none of them rude!" Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaimed.

He laughed.

"They have won your heart, at all events. But what I was going to say is that they have an extraordinary faculty for paying you pretty little compliments—making nice, friendly little speeches ——"

"Ah, don't I know that!" she said again.

"And then you must remember that English is a foreign tongue to them; that makes it all the more astonishing; but they are a quick-witted race."

"I think it is their disposition," said she. "If people are well-disposed towards you, and naturally obliging and courteous, the chance always comes, and the phrase too. Look at Murdoch, now. I know he is disappointed with this boat—ashamed of it, most likely. He is lamenting day by day that we haven't a yacht—away there in the West Highlands; but would he say it? He would not. I wish, Sir Ewen, you would ask him some time what he really thinks of England—I mean, when I *am not* by; for he knows I am an Englishwoman; and he *would be* sure to say something nice about England out of *kindness* to me ——"

Now just at this moment Murdoch happened to come forth from the saloon. He had smartened himself up after his morning's work; and he now timidly inquired of the young lady if he was not wanted at the tiller.

"Oh, no, thank you, Murdoch," said she, most pleasantly, "I mean to steer all the way into Worcester."

And then it was that Colonel Cameron—tempted by the opportunity—and forgetting half his hostess's injunction—asked Murdoch what he thought of England.

"Murdoch, what do you think of this country, now that you have seen so much of it?"

It was a shame. The poor lad glanced nervously at "the mustress," as he was used to call her. For this was a kind of public challenge; his truthfulness was at stake; and yet here was she, an Englishwoman, regarding him. But he was equal to the occasion, after all; for he took refuge in his native tongue.

"*'Si dùthaich bhriagh a th' innte gu dearbh; ach's fheàrr leamsa 'bhi am dùthaich fhèin*," said he, with averted eyes; and then he withdrew into the interior of the boat—making his way up to the bow, where he remained on guard.

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as soon as he was out of hearing.

Sir Ewen smiled a little.

"Perhaps you won't think it very complimentary. He said—'*It is a beautiful country, without any doubt; but I would rather be in my own country*'. A little touch of home-sickness; that is all."

"Indeed I don't see what else he could have said," said she, warmly. "If it comes to that—well I wish I were there too!"

"What?" cries Peggy.

"Oh, well, I am quite content with this expedition," she admits, in a half-hearted sort of way. "Yes; I wouldn't have missed it. It has been a very unusual experience; and most interesting at times; I should have been extremely sorry to have missed it. Still—still—well, I won't be so ungrateful as to say anything against it; for we have had many, many delightful days, in the strangest kind of places; and some of the most *delightful* evenings I ever spent in my life—haven't we, Peggy?

—and all I will say is this—that when we get you out among the western islands, far away there in the North, and in a proper sort of yacht, you will find it a little different: that is all I will say."

"In other words," says Miss Peggy, gravely, "'This is a beautiful country, without any doubt; but I would rather be in my own country'."

And then she turns to Colonel Cameron, and regards him for a swift second in a curious sort of way.

"Sir Ewen, do the people up there look upon you with any of the old clanship feeling—because of the name—and the history of your family?"

"Oh, no, no," he answers; "whatever of that exists now among the Camerons goes naturally to Lochiel. He is chief of the clan. Among the Camerons, whether they are in Argyllshire, or Inverness-shire, or in the backwoods of Canada, Lochiel is everybody; I am nobody."

"There are some I know in the Highlands," puts in Queen Tita, "who would not like to hear that said by anyone else of 'The Coarnel'."

And in this wise we stole along through the still landscape; making our way under small red bridges, and between woods, and upland slopes, and fertile plains, until we drew near to the ancient city. The approach to Worcester by way of the canal is extremely pleasant; there are suburban villas on sloping banks and surrounded with gardens, which, at this time of the year, were a mass of blossom. The wharves, when we got to them, were not so captivating, of course; yet we had little reason to complain; for we found the people very good-natured; one firm of wharfingers, in especial—whom we had no opportunity of thanking when we left—being so kind as to furnish us with a snug little berth for the Nameless Barge, and giving us free right of way through their premises. Accordingly, when we had got our things packed, we left them to be brought along by our crew; and started off for the town, and for the Unicorn Hotel.

And what a wild Maelström of a place was this into which we now plunged! The pavements were impassable with crowds of people; our eyes were bewildered with the staring shop

windows and signs; our ears distracted with the rattle of innumerable wheels. Our faint recollection of Worcester had been that it was rather an old-fashioned and sleepy town: now we found ourselves suddenly transferred from the remoteness and the silence of these pastoral wanderings into the full roaring blast of nineteenth-century life. The coffee-room at the Unicorn Hotel seemed a large hall. We had almost forgotten what kind of rooms we wanted. And as for dinner, how could we fix the hour even without Murdoch's adroit advice? We felt ourselves in a measure helpless—come out of another world—stranded upon an unknown shore. And then we became conscious that it was not we who ought to be bewildered, but the landlady, on finding herself confronted by a group of strangers, who had arrived on foot, and without luggage, and yet who apparently had some vague kind of desire to remain.

"I expected moats and battlements—gates, portcullises, drawbridges, and so on," said Miss Peggy, as we sat at lunch (we had at length summoned courage to make known our wants; and found that, although we hailed from the dim regions of Arcady, the trim waitress at the Unicorn sufficiently understood our speech); "but it is quite a modern city."

"It is not a warlike town any longer," her hostess admitted; "it is more of an ecclesiastical town: wait till we take you to the Cathedral, and show you all the quaint old buildings attached to it—with their pretty gardens, and ivied walls, and their look of learned repose. I remember them perfectly; I used to think that the people who lived in those houses must be very well content. And then, Peggy, as we go there, we must keep a look-out for the old furniture shops. I was told there were two or three very good ones in Worcester; and one never goes wrong in picking up some knick-knack—a little Sheraton table, or an eighteenth century tea-tray, or something of the kind—for it is sure to come in handy. If you don't want it yourself, it will do for a wedding present: and we are always having to look out for a wedding present: young people will go and make fools of themselves. Hardly any six months go by without our having to go and search for something; and, *of course, you* can't ignominiously fall back on spoons."

Miss Peggy looked up; and it was as clear as daylight that something exceptionally impertinent was on the tip of her tongue. Then her eyes fell; and she said not a word. That was one good thing that had been secured by the coming of Sir Ewen Cameron; she was very well behaved now; and even, at times, quite respectful to her seniors.

Thereafter we went out into the town again; but now we avoided the crowded thoroughfares—crowded because of some fair or cattle market, we were told; and made away for the quieter neighbourhood of the Cathedral and the Severn shore. And as we walked along, it was naturally to be expected that our ingenuous young friend should be willing—if not downright anxious—to hear all about Sexulphus and Wulstan, about Hardicanute, and William Rufus, and Stephen, and other great folk whose names are associated with the history of Worcester. But it was not Worcester at all that Miss Peggy had in her mind. What like was Inverfask House she was asking. Was it an old building—in the form of a castle, perhaps? Was it close to the sea? Were there any islands near it? Or mountains? How long had it belonged to this branch of the Camerons? Was Colonel Cameron likely to give up his soldiering, and go and live among his own people? How had the estate come to be so heavily mortgaged? Not through his fault, then? But the burdens were being gradually removed? And it was as a soldier, rather than as Cameron of Inverfask, that he was much thought of in the Highlands? Or in both respects, perhaps? And was he much liked by the people?

"I could imagine that he would be," she said, absently answering her own question.

And then an odd thing happened when we were at the Cathedral. We had shown her the richly-sculptured chancel, the beautiful cloisters, and so forth; and had taken her round to the back of the building, from which she had a wide view over the valley of the Severn, with the pale blue Malvern Hills in the south. She regarded these for a second or two, and then she said—

"*Is* that like Scotland?"

Queen Tita had just come along.

"Peggy!" she said, indignantly.

"Well?" the girl answered, in absolute innocence.

"That like Scotland? Is a painted tea-tray like Scotland? Wait till you see!"

It seemed hard that the Malvern Hills should have been used so despitefully by an Englishwoman; whereas the Scotch members of the party were probably only too grateful—after their long voyaging through woodland scenery—for that lofty and undulating line of blue along the horizon; nay, one of them was so heartily grateful that there and then he would have been content to call these hills mountains, if it would have pleased anybody. But no; Peggy would see something different from that, she was assured, when she came north. And they now spoke of her visit as a settled and certain thing.

And then again, Scotland, and Inverfask House, and the Young Chevalier all turned up once more that afternoon, and in this fashion. On our way back from the Cathedral, Mrs. Threepenny-bit chanced to espy a bric-à-brac shop which looked very promising indeed; and we were all of us glad enough to escape for a while from the hot glare of the sunlight into the coolness of this place, while she proceeded to search and hunt for possible wedding presents.

"Most of the English houses I have seen," Miss Peggy was saying to Colonel Cameron—they being merely bystanders and onlookers—"modern English houses, I mean—have seemed to me overcrowded with these things. And then the confusion—the mixing up of different countries and centuries: the drawing-rooms look like museums, without the arrangement of museums. I suppose, now, at Inverfask, there will be greater simplicity; the decoration will belong to one period ——"

"I'm afraid, Miss Rosslyn," said he, with a smile, "that Inverfask will have to plead guilty too. There have been a good many soldiers in our family; and they have brought home things from all parts of the world; so that there is a considerable jumble—Canada, Spain, Egypt, China, India, every place on the globe, I fancy, where English regiments have been——"

"But the hall?" said she, with a little touch of disappointment.

"Oh, the hall is entirely Highland—there, I think, you will be satisfied. And as our friends here have been trying to interest you in the '45 rising, you will find a good many curiosities belonging to that period. By the way," he added, "I have one or two relics of that time that I'm afraid don't honestly and entirely belong to me. As you have never been in Scotland, I suppose you never heard of Fassiefern House ——"

"Oh, yes," said she, modestly. "Wasn't that where the younger brother of Lochiel lived, when he came out and tried to persuade Lochiel not to go and join the Prince?"

He looked at her with some surprise; he did not know how this young lady had been drilled.

"Precisely," said he, "that was John Cameron of Fassiefern, whose great-granddaughter is at this moment Superior of Fort William. Well, perhaps you know also that a few days after Prince Charlie raised his standard at the head of Loch Shiel, he came along Glenfinnan, and put up at Fassiefern House, passing the night there. That, of course, is quite enough for the Highlanders: a house that lodged the Young Chevalier is a sacred kind of thing, with all its contents. And I think they might have left Fassiefern alone. It was a pretty, old-fashioned place, half-smothered in ivy—though it had been used as a farm-house for a long time back. But a year or two ago it seems it was wanted; I was told it had to be rebuilt for some reason or another; and in the process of tearing down and putting up again the old woodwork appears to have been either thrown out or given to any chance-comer. And very curious some of it is. I have a piece of curved balustrade that is made up of thin slices of wood that must have been spliced and put together with great labour; I suppose in those days—and in those parts—they had no other way of bending wood. That is one piece. Then I have one or two of the balusters; and a very quaint little frame for a mirror, in oak. The fact is, these things were being freely handed about in the neighbourhood; and a friend of mine, happening to pass through at the time, picked up a few of them, and sent them on to Inverfask for safe keeping. I fear I have no strong title to

them; but they will be preserved, at least; and I think if Fassiefern House had been mine, I should have preserved that intact also. By-the-way, Miss Rosslyn," he continued—still addressing himself to the tall young lady, while Queen Tita kept rummaging among mouldy old sconces, inlaid tea-trays, dower-chests, and the like, "I heard you say something the other day about these actual things being very interesting to you, as bringing historical times and events much more near, and making them seem real. Well, now, here was the house that Prince Charles lodged in just after he had raised his standard in Glenfinnan; and these were actually part of the house; and if you would care to take one or other of these bits of curiosities home with you to America ——"

"Oh, no, no, Colonel Cameron!—I could not think of such a thing—why, they are quite invaluable!" she exclaimed at once; and the hot blood sprang to her face.

"Not as something to remind you of Inverfask, and the West Highlands, and your visit?" said he, in his gentle way. "I won't ask you to take the piece of twisted balustrade—though that more certainly formed part of the house than anything else; because it would be cumbrous, and I don't see what you could make of it. But the little oak frame—it is very quaint and obviously very old: I think, Miss Rosslyn, we will persuade you to accept that, when we are all at Inverfask together."

And little it was that the small woman hunting there among pots and pans knew of what had been going on. No doubt she thought we three bystanders were idly talking of indifferent matters, or perhaps having a little amusement over the eagerness of her search. Had she learned that Colonel Cameron had just pressed on the acceptance of this young American lady one of the treasures of Inverfask House, and that Miss Peggy had tacitly consented to accept it as a souvenir of her forthcoming visit to his place in the Highlands, perhaps the curiosity hunter would not have been quite so easy in her mind. For it was with great equanimity that she now proceeded to collect her purchases, and to pay for them, and give instructions about their being forwarded to London; and it was with

a light heart that she took Peggy's arm and marched her out of the shop, saying we should just have time to get a cup of tea or something of that kind before walking along to the theatre.

And perhaps it was owing to our early arrival, or perhaps to the fineness of the summer evening outside, that when we entered the spacious, dimly-lit building, we found ourselves entirely alone. Not even the orchestra had as yet put in an appearance. Our footsteps had a hollow sound as we went down to the front of the dress-circle, and surveyed this large and dusky and empty place. Indeed, one could not help sympathising with those poor fellows of musicians, who, as they came in, glanced up at the rows of empty benches. Gloomy and phantasmal as the great hollow hall appeared, they were probably thinking that this was not the kind of house that caused the ghost to walk on Saturday. And yet, when they once began, their interest in their own professional work seemed in no wise lessened by this sorry sight. They played with abundant spirit; and, what is more, they played very good music—not the usual poker-and-tongs orchestra-rattle, but an exceedingly pretty waltz. Then, attracted by the sound, stragglers began to appear—in the pit, in the gallery. Matters were mending somewhat. A further raising of the lights cheered us. More stragglers appeared; there was going to be a semblance of an audience after all. And impatiently we waited for the upwinding of the curtain.

"Now, my dear Peggy," said Queen Tita to her neighbour, "if you're in luck you'll find here the drama in its pristine simplicity—and vigour, too. You won't be asked to 'follow the subjective Miss from Boston to the banks of Nile'. You'll have a villain that is a villain; and faithful love rewarded in the end; and virtue entirely triumphant. You'll see what appeals to the popular heart. Let it be a lesson to you ——"

But here the curtain was raised, and talking had to cease. And very soon it became apparent that Miss Peggy was in quite superlative luck; for this story that was being told her was constructed of the most simple and yet substantial materials. Here was the anguished heroine who clings to her lover in spite

of his poverty; here was the ruthless parent who casts her forth and bids her wed the misery that he prophesies for her; her lover—now her husband—battling with misfortune and cruel fate, and appealing to Heaven to protect his young and innocent wife; and, finally, a ruffian sworn to accomplish all manner of diabolical deeds, but in especial to capture and carry off the heroine, who had scorned his hateful advances. Just a horrible villain this one was, and he took no pains to conceal it; for, like the rest of the characters, he from time to time came down to the footlights, and in a telling speech revealed the secret workings of his soul. There was plenty of action besides; there were quite thrilling situations; and invariably the persons in the play addressed each other by both Christian and surname—"Gregory Hammond, you shall suffer for this!" "Beware, Richard Merreton!" and so forth —and everyone knows how impressive that is. Then the story proceeds apace; misfortunes accumulate upon the hapless pair; the stern parent remains inexorable; the dark-visaged scoundrel matures his plans; and the end of the act is truly most pitiful—for the villain shoots the father and has the guilt laid upon the young husband, who is forthwith hurried off to prison, leaving his suffering young wife and her infant babe at the mercy of a cruel world.

It seems hardly befitting the dignity of the legitimate drama that we should now have been treated, as an interlude, to a "variety entertainment". But there is a reason for all things.

"You see, Miss Peggy," one explains to this young stranger from the West, "when a play is played right off, or when you read a book straight through, you are apt to forget what spaces of time divide the parts; and you don't give proper value to the constancy of the lover or the faithfulness of his mistress. Now just remember, while all this dancing and fiddling is going on, that the young husband is suffering penal servitude for a murder he never committed; and the young mother is driven to distraction by the kidnapping of her child; while the villain, who is responsible for all this, is having a gay time of it with the old man's money—plovers' eggs and Schloss

Johannisberger for breakfast, no doubt. That is precisely what makes it hard—that the suffering of the good people should last such a long time. Besides, you may have several excellent performers in your company whom you can't get into the play: why shouldn't they have a chance of showing what they can do?"

"Oh, I don't object in the least," she says. "It's like a cigarette between the courses at dinner."

"And what do you know about that?"

"I have heard of it," she says, vaguely.

However, when the drama was resumed, the action moved forward with astonishing rapidity. Again and again the heroine was on the point of being carried off by that desperate villain; and again and again, at the precise moment wanted, behold, her husband!—who, it seems, has escaped from prison, and appears to be roaming about the country at large. But swift-footed Fate is now behind that deep-plotting scoundrel. All at once everybody appears on the scene; the officers of the law, instead of arresting the escaped prisoner, clap the manacles on the villain's wrists and march him off (a long farewell to plovers' eggs and Johannisberger!); the hero's innocence is triumphantly proved; the kidnapped child is restored to the joyful mother; and husband and wife are once more united, with every possible kind of felicity showered on their heads. In short, virtue wins all along the line; and wickedness and treachery and villainy are sent to the right-about—relegated to a prison-cell, in fact. We were quite glad; and we told Miss Peggy it was a solemn warning she should remember all her life; but when it came to be a question as to whether we should remain and see the extravaganza that was to follow, we thought we had had enough of the theatre for one evening, and so we went back to the Unicorn Hotel and to supper.

Late that night the miniature Manageress of this wandering party was in her own room, engaged in overhauling her millinery purchases of the day, and disposing them so as to admit of their being packed on the morrow. She seemed a little *thoughtful,* and was mostly silent; but, at length, she said, in *a cautious* sort of way—

"Do you know what Peggy told me before we went to the theatre this evening?"

"I do not."

"She told me Colonel Cameron had promised to give her some relic from Fassiefern House—a little mirror, I believe."

"I was aware of it."

She looked up quickly.

"Oh, you knew?" And then she said, rather slowly, and with no great air of conviction—indeed, she seemed questioning instead of asserting—"I suppose that is nothing. Oh, of course not. It is an interesting thing for an American girl to take home with her—especially when coming from Inverfask: a souvenir, that is all. And he has been very kind to her. Oh, no, I would not attach too much importance to his making her a little present; and—and, of course, she will value it!"

And yet, somehow, she does not seem quite satisfied in her own mind. The millinery does not receive much of her attention. Finally, she turns from the table altogether.

"Do be frank, now!—tell me!" she says—in a half-pleading, half-frightened way. "Have you noticed anything? Don't you think that Colonel Cameron's admiration for Peggy is just a little too marked? And she herself, too—have you noticed the way in which she speaks of him? Oh, good gracious, I have been trying to shut my eyes and ears; but if anything—if anything were to happen between these two—and me responsible ——"

"But how are you responsible?" one says to this incoherent person.

"We brought them together—isn't that enough?" she exclaims. "And there he is, a widower, twice her age at least, with an encumbered estate; and I suppose hardly anything beyond his pay. Think what her people would say of it! They wouldn't see any romance in it; they wouldn't find any fascination in her becoming Lady Cameron of Inverfask, and living up there in the North and winning the affection and gratitude of those poor people—which is quite clearly what Sir Ewen was talking about to-day. What do you suppose they care for the traditions of the Highland clans—or for Colonel

Cameron's reputation as a soldier, either? I suppose they never heard of the V.C. They would want to know how many dollars a year he had, and what he was going to settle on her! I'm sure I never thought such a thing possible, or I would never have suggested his coming. Of course," she adds, in contrite confession, though she is clearly very much perturbed and bewildered, "I thought she would admire him. I wanted her to do that. And I knew he would find her a pleasant companion. But just think what this would be for both of them! Why, it's madness! He ought to marry a rich woman, if he marries at all; and get Inverfask cleared of its burdens, and live there. And she *must* marry someone with money——'

"I think you will find that Peggy will marry the man she wants to marry without taking your advice or the advice of anyone else."

"Oh, it isn't advice—nor for worlds would I give her advice about such a thing," says this small creature, in quite evident distress. "It's the responsibility of having brought them together. With Mr. Duncombe that would have been entirely different. I was safe there, whatever happened. And that's the only thing to be done now—if there is any chance of such a foolish infatuation ——"

"What is the only thing to be done?"

"Why, to beg Mr. Duncombe to come back to us, and at once! I never was quite positively certain why he went away; but if it was merely through some little quarrel or misunderstanding, I dare say they would be inclined now to forget it. In any case, his presence would make a great difference; if she has any sense at all, she would naturally turn to the younger man, with all his advantages."

"And what's to be done with the Colonel?"

"I suppose he will go back to Aldershot," she says, wistfully. "I am sorry—but—but anything rather than this. And even if he stays, Mr. Duncombe's being with us will make all the difference in the world. He is an older friend of Peggy's; *she seemed* to like him very well; and he was so attentive to *her*· *and*—and she found him amusing. She can't help seeing

his advantages. She would know there would be no opposition on the part of her family. I will even confess that I thought it might turn out a match between Mr. Duncombe and herself; not that I particularly wished any such thing; but it seemed so suitable; and they got on very well together; and I knew that I was safe enough, whatever happened. Do write and beg him to come! He said he would, if it was in any way possible. My gracious, if this other thing were to happen, what would those people in America think of me!"

"They wouldn't think anything at all about you—whatever were to happen. You imagine they don't understand Peggy by this time? And here is another point. Supposing there were some such possibility as you suggest—supposing there were some kind of understanding between these two—though I am certain there is nothing of the sort, at present—do you fancy that Ewen Cameron is the kind of man who would allow himself to be interfered with? You are always talking of the gentleness of the Camerons. Well, they may be as gentle-mannered as most folk; but they have wills of their own, some of them. Did you never hear of the message that Sir Allan Cameron of Earrachd sent to George III.—or IV., was it?—when it was proposed to break up the 79th Highlanders—the regiment that Cameron of Earrachd had raised and commanded all through the Peninsular campaign? It was a pretty message to send to a king."

"What was it?"

"The proposal was to draft the Cameron Highlanders out to India, to make up the ranks of certain regiments that had been thinned there. '*Tell the King from me*'—this was the message that Sir Allan Cameron sent—'*that he may order the 79th to hell, and I will march at their head; but draft them he dare not and shall not.*' A very pretty message to be sent to the King of England!"

"I will tell that to Peggy in the morning," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, reflectively—as if, at such a juncture, it was necessary, or even prudent, to say anything to still further stimulate Miss Peggy's interest with regard to the Clan Cameron.

CHAPTER XVIII.

" Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-drooping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen, and save."

MOREOVER, the counsels of the night only increased her fears; and by next morning she had quite convinced herself that, unless some immediate measures were taken, Miss Peggy would persist in her folly, and end by marrying a beggar. A beggar, indeed! When the fair Mistress Lindsay was wooed and won and carried away from Edinburgh city by young Donald of the Isles—who had successfully concealed from her his high estate—she was, no doubt, agreeably surprised when he took her up to a mountain and bade her look abroad on the islands and castles and domains of which she was now to be lady and queen. Well, we live in less romantic days; but one could not help thinking that, even if the dreaded thing were to happen, Miss Peggy might not be altogether disappointed when she came in sight of Inverfask House. A moor yielding to two guns and fair shooting some five-and-thirty brace on the Twelfth, and—with proper management—good for eight or ten brace on an off day during the remainder of the season, a loch with abundance of brown trout, and with sea-trout running to four or five pounds; an extensive, if not over-productive farm; to say nothing of the plantations and "policies" surrounding the house itself, and rights of salmon-fishing for some miles along the coast: these seem to make a very comfortable provision for a beggar. But what was the use of discussing this fantastic impossibility?

"She is simply at her tricks again—she can't help it," one says to this anxious-eyed mite of a creature. "And as for Cameron, of course he likes to have a pretty girl to talk to: what soldier doesn't?"

"It isn't tricks at all," she says. "I know quite well when Peggy is merely playing pranks—I've seen her at it too often. But this is entirely different; her imagination seems to have been taken captive—you can see that in the interest she displays about the smallest matter connected with Scotland, or the Highland people, or the Highland regiments, for the matter of that; and then, she is so obedient and submissive; she isn't pretending to be a very, very proper young lady—with a wink at you when she gets the chance; it is real this time, or else I am mistaken, and I hope I am. And as for him, well, I hope I am mistaken there too; but his regard for her seems to be most marked—the quiet satisfaction he appears to have in her society—and the good-humoured toleration—encouragement, even, he has for all her wilfulness ——"

"Why, how long is it since he first set eyes on her?" one says, by way of protest against this ridiculous fancy.

"Oh, that is nothing," she answers. "A single day of this companionship is worth a whole London season."

"But even if it were true, where would be the harm?" one naturally asks. "Cameron is very far from being penniless."

"He is five-and-forty, if he is a day!" she exclaims.

"How often must I point out to you that at five-and-forty a man is just at the prime of his manhood—the very prime of his physical and intellectual strength?"

"Of course *you* say that," she retorts. "But ten years ago you said the same of five-and-thirty."

"And haven't I ten years' more wisdom to add to my judgment? I tell you now it is five-and-forty. And I say that Ewen Cameron is in his prime. Mind you, he can make a poor thing of some of the young fellows when they are out on the hill: I've seen more than one of them pretty well dead-beat by lunch-time—on the far tops at Achnashealach, I mean; and then you'd find the Cornel, instead of sitting down to the

cold beef and the whisky-and-water, merely take out his pipe, and lounge up and down, trying to make out which was Ben-a-vuick and which Ben Dearg. How India did not take more out of him it's hard to understand; but I suppose he is one of those firm-knit, fatless creatures that nothing seems to touch."

These details do not seem to interest this preoccupied person.

"If they had ever met before, at someone else's house," she said, absently. "But it will look as if we had expressly asked him to join our party, to—to bring this about. And how could we have dreamt of such a thing? Peggy knows as well as anyone else what her people expect of her; she has almost told me as much—though she is not very communicative about such affairs ——"

"Well, now, you see the result of cherishing historical prejudices and partisanships," one points out to her. "If you had only reconciled yourself to Jack Duncombe's project of making Charles Edward the dark foil to the heroic qualities of Alfieri, what would be the state of affairs now? Why, by this time, the book, or the play, whichever it was to be, would have been half done; and those young people would have been engaged to be married—as sure as ever was; and the mamma and papa in Brooklyn would be regarding you as the guardian angel of their daughter. Instead of which, here is an impecunious and elderly soldier, whom you yourself invited to come along; and you are worrying yourself to death because you think he is going to carry Peggy away to live on oatmeal and skim-milk in the Highlands."

"I suppose you think it is a joke?" she demands, indignantly.

"I do."

"Well, it is not. You don t know Peggy as I know her; or rather, when you are near her, you are blinded and fascinated like the rest of the men, and you don't notice anything—you don't see anything except her eyes. But I do. *And this has* frightened me. The only thing is, it can't have *gone very far*; and I daresay, if we could get Mr. Duncombe

to come back to the boat, she would return to her senses. For she *has* common sense; she is a remarkably shrewd young woman. And then, seeing the two of them together, how could she help contrasting them? Mr. Duncombe has every advantage He is nearer her own age; he will have plenty of money; and he is good-looking and amusing enough. Of course I am not comparing him with Colonel Cameron—except as a suitable match for Peggy; far from it; Colonel Cameron is a much finer stamp of man than Mr. Duncombe—to my thinking he is worth a dozen of any of the young men we know. But that isn't the question. I am thinking what her people in Brooklyn would say about it all—and about us. Now, will you write to Mr. Duncombe?"

"If you like."

"Will you telegraph?"

"If you like."

"Supposing he can get away, there are plenty of towns where he could join us. Teweskesbury ——"

"Not Tewekesbury—we shall be there to-day."

"Gloucester, then. You know," she added, eagerly, "how anxious he was to go down that open part of the Severn with us—to see how the boat would answer. He is sure to come along if you urge him."

"And shall I ask him to bring the Alfieri play with him?"

"He will not be so ill-mannered," said she, somewhat stiffly, "as to talk disrespectfully or cruelly of the unfortunate Prince Charles before one of the Camerons; I think I can trust him for that."

"And you may trust me for this—that, if he did, Colonel Cameron wouldn't care the fifteenth part of a brass farthing."

"I am not so sure," said she.

Now, when we were all together again in the coffee-room of this Worcester hotel, one naturally now and again glanced at Miss Peggy to gather from her demeanour towards Colonel Cameron whether there were any grounds for Queen Tita's suspicions. But nothing of the sort was visible. She was in an unusually merry mood. So far from there being anything

of the love-lorn maiden about her, she was neither more nor less than the wilful wretch whose sauciness and cantrips we had had to put up with all this time; nay, it was on this very occasion that her impertinence reached a point which demands serious notice. At breakfast, Queen Tita, who had just been reading her letters from home, was discoursing to Sir Ewen Cameron about her two boys, their wonderful qualities, ambitions,* and all the rest of it; while the father of those lads, having some small regard for the truth, was endeavouring to mitigate this panegyric by a few mild protests. But the truth was not acceptable—it seldom is; Madam grew more and more annoyed; Miss Peggy professed to sympathise with her deeply; and at last the younger woman reached over for a sheet of music she had purchased the previous day, scribbled something on the outside of it, and handed it to her friend. Now this of itself was a piece of downright rudeness—though, probably, it was the presence of the Colonel that had stilled her flippant tongue; but it was not until several days thereafter—and when we were on board again—that one happened accidentally to pick up this sheet of music and discover what she had pencilled on it. These were the words:—"Full fathom five *that* father lies!" Now, not only was this a monstrous perversion of the text of Shakespeare, it was also a gross mis-statement of fact: the only thing it proved being that a young woman given over to such unseemly jesting was in no parlous case as regarded her heart, or what she might consider her heart.

We had a busy morning before us; for, of course, we could not set about such a serious undertaking as the navigation of the Severn without having the ship fully provisioned and equipped for all emergencies. And what did this giddy-headed school-girl know about paraffin oil, candles, soda-water, two-shilling novels, fresh vegetables, preserved fruits, pigeon-pies, towing-ropes, stationery, telegraph-forms, and a hundred

* Their ambitions! If they have any ambition beyond that of *getting* so mauled at football that their own mother can hardly recognise them when they come home at night, they have so far been most successful in concealing it from the rest of the world.

other things that had to be thought of? We bade her go about her business and bother us no more. And then, Colonel Cameron remarking that he thought of walking along to seek out some spot from which he could get a better notion of the disposition of Cromwell's and Fleetwood's forces before the battle of Worcester, she turned to him, and asked him if he was likely to be passing by the cathedral, for that she would like to see again a rose-red hawthorn tree that she had remarked on the previous day, and that she thought was the most beautiful thing she had met with in England. Of course he instantly offered to escort her, and these two went away; while Mrs. Threepenny-bit (whatever she may have thought of that arrangement) had now to resume her consultations with Murdoch, in the hall of the hotel.

It was not, however, until past mid-day that the four of us, idly lounging about and waiting by the banks of the Severn—at the spot where the canal debouches into the river—beheld that long white Noah's Ark of a thing slowly approaching. When she came into the last lock we got on board; and, having seen that the additional towing-line was attached, and the longest poles ready, we awaited the opening of the great gates. A pleasanter day for our entrance upon the Severn we could not have demanded. There was a soft southerly wind blowing up stream, ruffling the wide yellow waters, and stirring the foliage on the high wooded bank; on the other shore the flat golden-green meadows were glowing in the sunlight; and far beyond them—and beyond some darker lines of elms—the pale blue Malvern hills rose into the shining silvery sky. A brisk and breezy day, sufficiently warm and sufficiently cool; altogether an auspicious setting forth.

And yet, when at length we found ourselves out in the wide current, it was clear that we were to have some unexpected experiences. For one thing, the river was in flood; and the wind, blowing up against the heavy yellow stream, raised a considerable bit of a sea; so that very soon the Nameless Barge was plunging and dipping in a most unusual manner. Queen Tita burst out laughing.

"What's the matter now?" asks the steersman.

"I've heard of a bluebottle pretending to be a bee," she says; "but I never heard of an old canal-boat pretending to be a yacht."

"It's all very well: I suppose you have left heaps of shawls and music and books lying about the saloon, and doubtless the water is spouting in at those bull's-eyes at the bow ——"

"Oh, my gracious!" she cries, and is off in an instant.

"And you, Miss Peggy," one continues, "you'd better go and find Murdoch and ask him to see that there are no loose wine-glasses lying about."

"Oh, certainly," she says (for she is a biddable lass when she is not bent on mischief), and she, too, disappears.

However, our adventuring forth into this raging ocean was a small matter. A more serious thing was this. The bargeman's rule of the road is "business first and pleasure after": that is to say, in passing each other, business barges take the inside, and pleasure ones the outside, the latter getting their towing-lines over smoke-stacks and piled hay as best they can. Now the tow-path at this part of the Severn runs high along the side of a steep bank; we had necessarily a long line out; and if, in putting our craft into mid-stream to pass the barges coming north, her head yawed over to the western shore—which it was very apt to do with this heavy flood astern—that was invariably the moment chosen by our Horse-Marine, who was riding, to urge forward his charger. The inevitable consequence was a sudden and savage wrench, and a tilt over that set the plates dancing and the women (inside the saloon) screaming, and that threatened to plunge the whole lot of us into Sabrina's tawny wave. But all the same, we made such excellent progress that every now and again the Horse-Marine indulged in a little trot, which was quite inspiriting to behold. We passed the mouth of the Teme; we glided swiftly along by Beauchamp Court and Kempsey; we swept round by Cliffy Wood and Farm; and on by Severnstoke and Severn End. This was a singularly English-looking landscape through which we were passing—the high, red bank above the wide rippling river; the poplars and alders all trembling and rustling in the

soft breeze; along the margin of the stream, yellow-grey reeds and green-yellow willows; silver-white clouds crossing the spacious sky, with here and there a glimpse of blue; finally, at the horizon, the pale line of the Malvern Hills—those far heights on which Caractacus and his brave Silures entrenched themselves and made their last determined and despairing stand against the Roman legions. Very peaceful now appeared this smiling and cultivated plain. It seemed hard to believe that it was through these very fields close by that Fleetwood's horse had to make their way before they came up with the Royalist troops, and drove them, "from hedge to hedge," back into Worcester town.

The two women returned with their report: not a drop of water had come in by the bull's-eyes or anywhere else; while all was secure in the lockers.

"I'm just in love with this boat," observes Miss Peggy.

"Children are easily pleased," answers her hostess—who shares Murdoch's covert opinion about our noble craft.

"I believe she could cross to America!" the young lady continues.

"So she could," the other says with bitter irony, "if she were properly lashed on to the deck of a White Star Liner."

"Say, now, where is the part of the Severn you've always been talking about as something to be feared?"

"Oh! that's away down south—from Sharpness to Bristol; that is where you get into the open estuary," the steersman answers her.

"And will there be any danger?"

"What a question! Danger in a boat capable of crossing the Atlantic!"

"Oh, don't imagine that I shall be afraid!" the young lady says promptly. "At least, I hope not. If I am, I'll conceal it to the best of my ability."

"I don't think you are likely to show must fright," said Colonel Cameron, looking at her with an approving eye. "Especially as you will be quite prepared—you will have time to screw up your courage beforehand. It's sudden danger that

unnerves people. I remember the most awful fright I ever got in my life—well, fright is a feeble word: the paralysing sensation of fear was so bewildering ——"

"You!" said Miss Peggy. "Why ——"

But she could not tell the man to his face that it was impossible for her to believe that he had ever been afraid of anything.

"It was at a small inn in the Highlands," said he, "where I put up for some salmon-fishing. Shall I tell you the story?—it's the only ghost-story I've got. Very well. I was there all by myself at the time; and very happy, too—capital sport during the day; snug quarters in the evening. One night I had dined as usual, and had drawn my chair in front of a blazing peat-fire, lit a pipe, and got a book. No, Miss Rosslyn, I didn't fall asleep and dream my ghost; just you wait. I was reading on in a dead silence; for at the back of the inn, where my sitting-room was, there was nothing but fields; all the traffic at Altnaharra goes on in front. Besides it was getting late. Well, I was reading away in this absolute silence when of a sudden I heard a sigh just behind me—or a groan, rather—I was so startled by the extraordinary sound that I couldn't tell which it was. Of course I wheeled round in an instant—and there—right before me—was an enormous head, with two staring eyes and two large horns. Talk about fright!—this was simply a paralysis of sensation altogether. When it is a man who startles you, and you wheel round angrily, your first impulse is to strike; but this thing was certainly not a man. Not a man—I should think not—simply an enormous head and huge eyes and nostrils—motionless, too—absolutely motionless—but the eyes glaring. Fright?—I wonder I am alive. And then, just as quickly, the explanation flashed in upon my mind: it was the head of a cow. I had left the lower sash of the window open, to let out the peat-smoke; the sitting-room was on the ground-floor; this beast had got loose somehow, and wandered round from the byre, attracted by the *light*, I suppose. When I went forward to it, it still kept *staring;* then it withdrew its head, with another snort; and

then I could see its dark bulk going along in the direction of the farm-yard. There—that is my only ghost story."

"But just suppose it had been an old woman who was sitting there," said Queen Tita. "Why, she would have run away through the house shrieking and declaring that the devil had just appeared to her."

"My impression is," he said, "that an old Highlandwoman would have been more familiar with a cow's eyes and horns. It was the enormous size of the head that bewildered me—being so near—and nothing visible but itself. I suppose, now," he continued, as we were gaily careering down this wide river, "it is really possible for a man to frighten a bull by stooping and staring at it from between his legs. But does the bull forget that it saw the man upright—that he is a man indeed? I remember a friend of mine telling me how he and a companion of his had been out shooting somewhere in the Highlands, and on their way home they had to cross a field that had been partly ploughed. In the fallow part of the field a bull had been turned loose. They paid no heed to him—that is the best way in all circumstances, I believe, if only the brute will let you—and thought that they were going to get past all right; but they soon perceived that he meant mischief. Indeed, there was no mistake about it; and my friend made tracks for a stone dyke, over which he clambered with his gun in his hand. Not so his companion. Perhaps he was afraid to make a run for it—or he was ashamed—or determined to give proof of his courage; however, he put his gun on the ground, turned his back to the bull, stooped down, and glared at the animal from between his legs ——"

"And that was enough to frighten the beast away!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, quickly.

"Oh, was it?" observed the narrator, with grim placidity. "No, it was not. Quite the reverse in fact. The bull came at him like a live tornado—caught him one, as the saying is—and the next moment he was rolling head over heels—like a cheese—along a ploughed furrow ——"

"And killed?"

"No, not killed. When he picked himself up, there was a plough near, and he dodged behind that; but in the meantime the bull was engaged in trampling his gun to bits with its fore feet—and so he made his escape. They say he has less faith now in rustic traditions."

"He was not a personal friend of yours?" one ventures to ask.

"No."

"You only heard of him?"

"That was all."

"Was your friend who told you the story a person of strict veracity?"

"Like other people, I suppose. But what then? Oh, I see. The witness may stand down?"

"Yes, you may go. The Court expresses no opinion."

A most beautiful river the Severn surely is; and on this mellow afternoon the wind had mostly died away; so that the high red banks, all hanging in foliage, were faithfully mirrored on the smooth surface of the stream, save where some chance puff would come along, breaking the oily russets and olive-greens with a keen shaft of blue—the colour of the overhead sky. Subjects for a water-colour painter formed themselves at every turn and winding; and at last, when we came in sight of the square grey tower of Tewkesbury Abbey, just visible above the trees, and the ruddy houses of the town appearing here and there beyond the warm green meadows—the tower and houses and meadows and trees all aglow in the light streaming over from the evening skies—we began to think that too much had Avon and Thames and Kennet occupied our artists, and that some of them whom we knew and could name might do worse than pitch their tents more frequently just a little further west.

Now came the question as to where we should moor for the night—some snug place where we could make surely fast, and defy this swollen current. We had no need to go on to the town; for we had abundant supplies on board; indeed, we usually refused the shelter of wharves and basins unless, for

some reason, we wanted to put up at an hotel, and wished to have the boat within convenient distance. We finally pitched upon a nook under a steep red bank—the Royal Hill it is called—where there were some stout willow-bushes close down by the water; and when we had run our gallant vessel in among these, and fastened her securely both stem and stern, Captain Columbus was free to go off in search of lodgings for himself and the Horse-Marine. Our first experience of the Severn had been most satisfactory. The Nameless Barge had done everything that could have been expected of her. We began to look forward to Sharpness Point without any overwhelming anxiety.

At dinner that evening we refrained from lighting the lamps, the twilight without being so singularly beautiful. It was in the earlier manner of Mr. W. L. Wyllie, so to speak. The wide smooth surfaces of the water were breadths of pale saffron and exquisite lilac-grey reflected from an opalescent sky; there were warm olive-green shadows under the opposite bank; and then, as it happened, there was a withered tree on that shore, and the mirrored black stem and leafless branches came right down to the middle of the stream. A single crimson line in the purple-blue of the west told of the sinking sun. The birds were still singing—somewhere in our neighhourhood—probably among the bushes over the steep red hill behind us. But it was the river that chiefly claimed our attention—the tender and ethereal and softly merging colours, the palely changing lights: each window framed a picture, as the day died out of the world. And when at last it grew so dark that we had to have recourse to lamps and candles, we knew quite well that in the clear dark-blue heavens overhead the first silver-points of the stars were beginning to throb.

Now, all this time Queen Tita had said not a word about the possible coming of Jack Duncombe; perhaps she feared that the mere suggestion might be construed by Colonel Cameron into a hint that he should vacate his berth. That was not so, as it happened; nevertheless his offer to quit was sufficiently prompt.

"Oh, Peggy," said she, that night after dinner, in an

offhand kind of fashion, "would you be surprised to find an old friend coming to join us at Gloucester?"

Miss Peggy glanced up in rather a frightened fashion—for Colonel Cameron was also sitting out here in the warm, still night, contentedly smoking his cigar. Queen Tita caught sight of that quick look—the glow from the open door of the saloon falling full on the girl's face.

"No," said she, gravely, "it isn't Mr. A'Beckett. It is strange we have heard nothing of him of late. You haven't heard, Peggy?"

"No," said Miss Peggy, instantly. "Why should I?"

"Oh, well, I thought he might have some more information to send you," her hostess remarked, in a general kind of way. "I don't think we study the guide-books as closely as we ought. However, it isn't Mr. A'Beckett. It's Mr. Duncombe."

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Peggy. "That will be very nice."

"I am not sure he is coming," she continued, "but we have telegraphed to him; and you know how anxious he was to see how the boat would answer in going down the Severn. So I shouldn't be surprised to find him turning up at Gloucester."

"In that case," said Colonel Cameron, with perfect good humour, "I must clear out. I shall hate him heartily, I know, but still I've had my turn ——"

"Oh, no, no, not at all," Queen Tita said at once, and most anxiously. "Surely if this caravansary of a thing has any recommendation it ought to be able to take in another passenger, and easily. Why should not one of you gentlemen sleep in the saloon? Murdoch can make up an extra bed—he has often had to do that for us on other boats; and all that is necessary will be for you to choose amongst yourselves which is the earliest riser. What can be simpler than that?"

"And then his being on board would come in so well just now," observed Miss Peggy, with demure eyes. "There would be Captain Columbus, Murdoch, Mr. Duncombe, Colonel Cameron, you two, myself—yes, that would just be right—we *could take for* our motto, 'We are Severn'."

"*Peggy,*" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely, "this is

business: I won't be interrupted by your irresponsible frivolity. Well, now, supposing Mr. Duncombe should be able to join us, he is the newcomer, and should take his chance ——"

"But I have had my turn of the cabin," Colonel Cameron remonstrated, "and I assure you I shall be most comfortable in the saloon. I should call the whole arrangement the height of luxury ——"

"But your things are all in your cabin, and why should they be disturbed, Sir Ewen?" said she—and who is bold enough to dispute her will when her farthing rushlight of a mind shows us clearly what it is?—"Mr. Duncombe was always an early riser. He used to get up and see that everything was arranged about the boat and the day's travelling by the time the rest of us were ready for breakfast. Peggy used to get up early, too," the fiend continued, regarding the younger lady with a sweet and affectionate look. "She was studying English history at that time—Runnymede and King John, Guy of Warwick, and Piers Gaveston, and the rest of them; and the seclusion of the morning is good for study. She seems to have left off lately; but I suppose she will take it up again when we get to Gloucester or Bristol? Is there any English history connected with Bristol? If there isn't, Chatterton will do. Or the introduction of bird's-eye tobacco. Or the three sailors of Bristol city—indeed, anything will do, when Peggy is bent on acquiring information. But in the meantime, Sir Ewen, you are in possession of the cabin; it would be a great pity for you to move your things ——"

"Just as you please," said he, "though I don't know that it is wholesome training for a soldier to find himself fixed in such comfortable quarters. However, you must promise me one thing —that the moment you find me in the way, you will tell me."

"Oh, yes, I will tell you," said she, with a little laugh (and apparently she had now quite abandoned any hope or wish she may have formed about his returning to Aldershot). "But you must not make fun of us, Sir Ewen. Everyone knows how fastidious officers are. Well, I don't wonder at it. Both they and their men suffer sufficient privation in time of war; and it

is but natural that when they come home they should expect to be well treated. But everyone says that the military clubs are just the perfection of management; and when the officers of a regiment give a ball, the supper is sure to be most sumptuous; and then about their own dinners—well, I have heard how particular they are ——"

"And you know why they have to be particular about such things—and why they look after the affairs of their club?" said he. "It's because they're so poor. It's only the rich political fellows who can afford to let their club be managed anyhow. Oh, no, you mustn't blame us for being particular—you might even say that we are penurious ——"

"Penurious?" said she. "Well, I don't know much about what the officers of other regiments may be; but I should say it was a charge not likely to be brought against the officers of the Highland regiments—at least, such of them as are Highlanders."—An amazing remark, if one thinks of it; because it was quite irrelevant; and not only that, but it came from a person whose chief fear at the moment—as she professed, at least—was that the young lady under her care might be too strongly influenced in favour of those Highland people as here represented to her. However, Jack Duncombe was coming, we hoped; and that would cure all.

Then she said—

"I hope Murdoch is enjoying his night ashore. Captain Columbus looks the kind of man who would know how to order a good supper for them. And that reminds me: Peggy, you and I shall have to be butler to-night—will you come and help me? It's about soda-water time."

"Won't you let me help too?" said Colonel Cameron, rising to follow them into the saloon.

"Oh, yes, I will let you help," said she, cheerfully. "I always like you to mix my sleeping-draught for me, Sir Ewen—it is something recognisable then. As for poor Peggy, I don't know how she gets on at all. We haven't had any iced water *on board* since ever we started."

"*Why*, I haven't tasted iced water all the time I have been

in England," said Miss Peggy, indignantly. "I wouldn't. The ice in England isn't cold enough for a free-born American. Besides, I would rather go without it than be preached at."

"And what have they been saying to you, you poor dear?" observed Queen Tita—who was busy with tumblers, glasses, soda-water, cigar-boxes, spirit-stands, biscuit-boxes, and the like, while the tall young lady was drawing the red curtains across the windows and making everything comfortable for the night. "Have they been wounding your sensitive soul? Well, never mind; preaching or no preaching, you leave ice water alone, and keep the June roses in your cheeks."

Then, when this small community was entirely and snugly shut in from the dark and silent world without, there was a vague hint ventured about a game of whist, or *vingt-et-un*, or something of that sort.

"We should have to clear all those things off the table," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regretfully, "and they are so handy. Peggy, why don't you bring out your banjo? What has made you so lazy? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The fact was, Miss Peggy had hardly ever touched her banjo since Colonel Cameron came on board. Why, we hardly knew. We could perhaps have understood her not caring to ask us—before one who was comparatively a stranger to her—to join in any of her daft choruses; but there were plenty of the old-fashioned plantation songs that suited her voice very well, and that have almost recovered from their vulgarisation of five-and-twenty years ago. Surely "Mary Blane" is pathetic in its simple way. "The Old Folks at Home" remains a favourite. There are many more; and we knew that she knew them; but somehow she had always seemed disinclined to open that leather case since Sir Ewen Cameron joined us. And so she was on this occasion.

"It is so delightfully quiet here," she said, "it is a shame to spoil it by that strumming."

"I am quite sure Colonel Cameron has never heard you sing 'Nellie Gray,'" Queen Tita suggested, insidiously.

"And I should very much like to hear it," said he.

With that, she obediently went and got the banjo, and resumed her place on the couch; then, with a few rippling notes of prelude, she began to sing—

"There's a low green valley on the old Kentucky shore,
Where I've whiled many happy hours away"—

And very well she sang, too, if hardly with the confidence she usually displayed. And when she had finished, and when Queen Tita was begging her to sing "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane," Colonel Cameron said—

"Well, Miss Rosslyn, when I have the pleasure of receiving you two ladies in the North—when old Duncan—that is my factotum up there—gets your things out of the dogcart, I shall be enormously disappointed if I don't see that yellow leather case amongst them."

She looked up suddenly.

"A banjo at Inverfask!" she exclaimed, in a kind of awe-stricken way—as though the incongruity was quite startling to her.

"Why not?" said he, simply.

And surely stranger things than that have happened in this odd mixture of a world.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Next crown the bowl full
With gentle lamb's-wool,
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger;
With store of ale, too,
And this ye must do
To make the wassail a swinger."

"Do you know what true wisdom is?"

"No."

"Would you like to be told?"

"Yes."

"Then I will tell you," says this most amiable and obliging Philosopher (whose brown hair, by-the-way, invariably looks prettiest in the sunlight; and on this joyous morning all the wide Severn valley is shining clear). "I will tell you," she says, blandly (though her eyes would seem to be chiefly engaged with the fair landscape all around her—the broad stream quivering in light, the ruddy banks hanging in foliage, the wide meadows, the ethereal blue hills at the horizon, and one distant black cloud from which descend streaks of grey, showing that away over there they are having a summer shower to slake the thirsting leaves). "True wisdom consists in recollecting how well off you are. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet people never do it. It's only their miseries they pay any heed to. The toothache, or an overcharged bill, or an ill-fitting dress will vex them beyond anything; but when they don't have these worries or any other, they forget to be grateful. They don't realise their good fortune. They don't reflect how glad they ought to be that at the present moment there isn't a bit of dust in their eye, and that their boots aren't pinching their toes, and that they are not crossing the English Channel in rough weather. You know what the physiologists say—that when you are not conscious of having any body at all—when

you don't seem to be aware that you have got a head or a hand or a foot—then everything is going well, and you are in perfect health: you know that."

"I've heard something of the kind."

"But people in that happy condition never think of congratulating themselves," she exclaims. "They take it all as a matter of course; they forget how lucky they are. When they have rheumatism, they make a mighty fuss; but when they haven't it, they don't recollect that it's a very nice thing to be able to walk, or move your arms, just as you please. Now, that is true wisdom—to remember how well off you are—and how many ailments you might have, and haven't—and to be very grateful and thankful and contented."

"Yes, Miss Marcus Aurelius, that is all very well—for you," one says to her. "You ought to be content, certainly. Look at your position. You are young—you are passably good-looking ——"

"I thank you," she says, in her cool American way.

"— you have excellent health and spirits—you have an abundance of friends and well-wishers—you have nothing in the world to do but look pretty and please people. It would be a singular thing if you were not well content. You would be as unreasonable as the man in the ancient legend whose wife said to him: 'Well, Jim, you beat anything. You were drunk on Sunday night and you were drunk on Monday night; you were drunk on Wednesday night, and here your're drunk again on Friday night—that's already four nights in the week; and still you're grumbling! What more would you like? Would you like to be an angel?'"

"Ah, I see I can't make you understand," she says. "It isn't at all being merely content: you should make yourself happy by thinking of the various anxieties and ailments and distresses that you have suffered from or might suffer, and that you are now free from: it isn't content, it is congratulation. When I came outside this morning, and looked at the beautiful *country* all around, and breathed the delicious air—well, I *don't know* how to explain it—there was such a delight—and

the only grievance I could invent was that it was all going by. It seemed a pity one couldn't bottle up some of the summer for use in winter. Of course, if you were an artist, you could. Landscape pictures are a kind of bottled-up summer; you can do a lot with them in winter, if you are quite alone, and try to believe very much. Say," she continues, in her usual inconsequent fashion, "why is your wife so anxious that Mr. Duncombe should come back to the boat?"

She puts this question in an unconcerned manner, and with downcast eyes; in fact, she is now pretending to sketch, on the printed fly-leaf of a novel, some simulacrum of a withered tree on the other side of the stream, and the better to make her drawing visible across the advertisements, she, from time to time, moistens the lead-pencil with her lips, which is a most reprehensible practice.

"Is he one of the distresses you have suffered from, and would rather now be free from?" one asks, in a general kind of way.

"Certainly not. I liked him very well—I liked him very well indeed. But if he comes back now, it will be with a difference. Things have got altered somehow—don't you feel that? This hardly seems the same boot that used to lose itself in the middle of the Thames, with everybody trying different kinds of poles. Doesn't it feel a long time since then? And even since Mr. Duncombe left us? Why, that was only the other day, as you might call it; and yet it all seems cut off and distant somehow. I believe it was the tunnels did it."

"Did what?"

"Why, since we came through those tunnels, we seem to have come into another world altogether. Everything is different—the landscape is different ——"

"Are the people different?"

"I don't know," she says, reflectively; "but I seem to feel a different kind of atmosphere around us, somehow. Don't you think it will sound odd to hear Mr. Duncombe, if he comes back, talking about theatres, and comedies, and magazine articles? The critics, too—they have been let alone for such a long time: I wonder if he will have any new

grievance against them when he comes back. Yes, it will be different ——"

One could perceive in a vague way what she meant, though her speech was not very precise.

"But don't you want to hear what has been going on in town—what new books are being talked about—and new plays?"

Miss Peggy lifts her eyes for a moment.

"Don't you think," she says, with a little hesitation, "that he is interested in rather small things? To write a comic piece for a theatre—that isn't a great ambition, is it?"

"It is a harmless one, surely."

"Oh, yes. You laugh at the moment, and forget. But these are not the things that remain in the mind. Sometimes I almost wish that Colonel Cameron had not repeated that ballad of 'Gordon of Brackla'; if I happen to lie awake at night, it comes into my head—I seem to hear the very tones he used—and it makes me shiver; it is so terrible a story. And yet I am quite sure that the interpretation you and he put on it is wrong. I don't believe the wife taunted her husband, and sent him out to fight, with the notion that he would be killed, and that then she would marry the other one—'fierce Inveray'. I don't think that was it at all. I believe she was convinced that her husband could fight against any odds, and would return victorious. That was a great deal more likely—she was the wife of a man renowned for his bravery ——"

"My dear young lady, that is a very charitable construction; but what are you to make of her conduct after her husband was slain?—

> "'A bridegroom young Inveray stood by her side;
> She feasted him there as she ne'er feasted lord,
> Though the bluid o' her husband was red on his sword.'"

"Ah, but that was to make sure!" says Miss Peggy, with a kind of proud air. "If she had tried to defend the castle, Inveray would have burned it down, and killed her, and she *would have* lost her revenge. No; she had to pretend to *make friends*; and then there was a wedding; and in the

middle of the feast she watched her chance—and stabbed him. That was the end of it—then or thereafter: I am certain."

"And a very dramatic ending, too."

"Well," she continues, "I wish I dared ask Colonel Cameron to write out that ballad for me."

"Dare! That is an odd kind of word. Why, he'll be delighted."

"Will you ask him for me?"

"Certainly not. Ask him for yourself. Do you think he will bite?"

"And why is he called Colonel?" she demands, with unreasoning petulance. "Why isn't he a Major, or Captain, or General—I wouldn't mind what it was—but Colonel ——"

"You are a little too familiar with the title on your side of the water?"

"And you know how that is?" she says instantly. "No, you don't. I can see you don't. Well, I will tell you. You're always calling me a school-girl, but there are lots of things I can teach you ——"

"No doubt."

"The reason we have so many Colonels in America," she remarks, with an oracular air, "is simply this—that at the end of our war all the survivors were raised to that rank. That was what a grateful country did. That is what I call true gratitude. What they did with people above that rank I don't know; but all the rest were made Colonels. What do you do at the end of one of your wars?"

"We haven't time to do anything before another has begun."

"Then your soldiers get plenty of chances. Say, do you think I could get a copy of 'Men of the Time' over there in Tewkesbury?" asks this persistent questioner.

"You would be more likely to get it in Gloucester."

"Is it an expensive book?"

"I don't know; perhaps eight or ten shillings. But if you mean buying it, it is a bulky thing to carry about."

"I could cut out the pages I want. I should like to see all that Colonel Cameron has done—a list of the engagements

he has been in, because—because naturally it is interesting, when you are meeting anyone from day to day—well, you want to know all about him."

"And who told you that Sir Ewen Cameron was in 'Men of the Time'?"

"Your wife. I was asking her what battles he had been in; and she said I ought to look there ——"

"Why not ask himself?"

"Oh, I couldn't—I couldn't do that!" she exclaimed—and then she suddenly ceased, for at this moment the door was opened, and here was the tall, sandy-haired Colonel himself, looking very smart and fresh, and with a cheerful "Good-morning!" on his lips. Nor was Miss Peggy much confused; no—she frankly gave him her hand; and there was a smile on her face as she returned his greeting, and inquired if he had heard any tidings of breakfast.

We passed most of that morning in Tewkesbury—having got ashore and clambered up the steep, ruddy, slippery bank, and thence made our way into the town. We crossed the Avon—not running red with blood, as the chroniclers say it did after the memorable battle of some four hundred years ago, but running yellow in spate, with the recent heavy rains. And when we got into the quiet, wide-streeted town, we saw further evidence of the floods that had visited the valley of the Severn; for along the pavements the people were busy pumping out the coffee-coloured water that had submerged their cellars and kitchens. Some of those old houses looked unstable enough already—their projecting upper storeys apparently like to topple down on the heads of the passers-by; but perhaps the people of Tewkesbury—which is built at the confluence of three rivers and several brooks—are used to this sapping of foundations. Queen Tita asked of her young friend to point out which of these ancient tenements was the scene of the murder of the young Prince Edward (they say his blood still stains the floor), but Miss Peggy answered that she had not been reading *up her English* history that morning; she had been imparting *wisdom,* she said.

And yet, when we had got along to the Abbey Church, and were within stone's throw of the Bloody Meadow, as the place is called to this day, she showed herself sufficiently interested. Mere recitals of battles and sieges she did not heed much; but a personal and dramatic incident could immediately enchain her attention, especially if it was connected with anything she could actually see. Was it, then, to this very gateway now before her that the Abbot—interrupted in his celebration of the Mass by the wild battle without—had come, bearing the Host in his hands, and forbidding Edward and his victorious followers to enter, until the King had sworn to spare the lives of the defeated Lancastrians, who had fled for safety into the sacred building? And was it up between these massive Norman pillars that the King and his soldiers and the monks marched to the high altar singing their thanks to Heaven for the great victory, while the slaughter of the fugitives was still going on outside the walls? Silent enough now was this solemn nave—our footfalls on the stone the only sound. And the good folk of Tewkesbury have got a race-course quite close to the Bloody Meadow—where the Avon and Severn join.

When we got back to the Nameless Barge, all available poles, spars, and oars were called into requisition, for now we had to cast her loose upon the wide and flooded river, in order to get her over to the tow-path side. But by dint of much indiscriminate paddling (we had neither rowlocks nor tholepins, and it was difficult to get a purchase on the water from any part of the boat), we eventually got her across and under the bridge; then we had the horse hitched to again; and away we went down stream once more. It was a landscape-artist's day—bright, breezy, and changeful; with sudden bursts of sunlight touching here and there and widening out over field and grove; the atmosphere singularly clear, and yet lending itself to tender hues of grey and lilac and silver in the far distance. Then this noble river seemed to grow more and more beautiful—when we had passed the town and the race-course, and were making rapid way southward. The country seemed to grow more and more rich and bountiful; there were parks and woods and stately mansions,

and all these shining in this vivid light—indeed, there was one green slope, the elms on the summit of which threw almost black shadows, so keen was the glare. And then, again, a pale network of cloud would partially veil the sun; and all the colours around us would grow quieter in tone, though they were none the less harmonious; and when one looked at the yellow rippling river, the wooded banks, the lush green meadows, perhaps here or there a bit of a red roof peeping through the trees, perhaps the grey tower of a church crowning some windy height—well, then, if we had found in a corner of this composition the signature *Alfred Parsons, pinxit*, we should hardly have been surprised.

We found the Severn a busy river, too; and we had quite sufficient occupation in getting our awkward vessel past the successive strings of barges that were being brought up by steam-power against the flood—we having to keep outside of them, and get our tow-rope over their smoke-stacks somehow or anyhow. But with Murdoch at the bow and Captain Columbus on the bank, we succeeded in getting by without any serious mishap. Help from the bargemen themselves we got none—not that they were in any way sulky or unwilling, but that the sight of this strange craft coming down the Severn awoke an all-conquering curiosity, and they could do nothing but stare at us until we had passed. Then we encountered a small steamer coming along at a considerable pace, that gave us a good bit of a wash; but the Nameless Barge dipped and bobbed and rode out these billows quite as if she had been to the manner born; and, altogether, we thought we were doing mighty fine. In this fashion we swung along by Chaseley Rye, and Deerhurst, and Turley; and then we halted for luncheon at Haw Bridge, there being a certain White Lion in the neighbourhood, where Captain Columbus proposed to bait our gallant steed.

"Well," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, pulling in her camp-stool to the table with much complacency, "we have got so far in safety, thank goodness. But I'm glad I'm not responsible. When the worst comes to the worst, I mean to simply sit still *and be drowned*. If we have had to come through so many *scrimmages* on a quiet bit of an ordinary river ——"

"Oh, pass those pickles and hold your tongue!" one had to say to her. "An ordinary river! I tell you it is a whirlpool, a cataract, a Niagara and Corrievreckan rolled into one. I tell you we have done very well. Why, we excited the admiration of every bargeman we passed. Didn't you see how they were struck with astonishment at our skilful seamanship?"

"They were struck with astonishment at something," she observed. "I suppose they never saw a house careering down the Severn before. But if we have all these escapades on this quiet part of the river, what is to happen to us when we get into the open estuary?"

"Don't you think you could have constructed a boat that would have saved you from all these apprehensions?" asked Sir Ewen Cameron, with cold impertinence. "I mean with something stronger along the sides, so that you wouldn't have to fear striking against the wall of a tunnel or bumping against one of those heavy barges?"

"Certainly," one made answer to this amateur critic. "She might have been armour-plated all round her gunwale, and she might have been furnished with a few twenty-ton guns, in case we should fall in with pirates."

"Or did you never think of taking one of those barges themselves and fitting it up?"

"Yes, with underground apartments, where we should all be living like moles, or water-rats rather."

"There might be skylights," said he.

"But, Sir Ewen," said Miss Peggy, "what would become of the charm of these picnic luncheons? As we are sitting now, each of those windows frames a landscape—why, you might consider the five windows five pictures hung up to adorn the walls. And then they are living pictures—real water and skies and trees."

He deferred to her at once.

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said he. "When we are resting quiet like this, it is much more delightful to have the view all round us; it is when we are going on that the awkwardness of having a top-heavy house on the boat comes in. Of course,

you wouldn't have all that trouble with the tow-rope if you went by steam. A small steam-launch—specially fitted to get into the canal-locks ——"

"Oh, Sir Ewen!" Queen Tita exclaimed, "fancy having a noisy, rattling, smoky thing like that in those beautiful still solitudes we came through! All the charm and fascination of the quiet would vanish at once. And think of the smell of the oil—and the throbbing of the engine ——"

"Look here, Cameron," one of us had to interpose, to put an end to this insensate discussion, "the political people think nothing of taking a Cabinet Minister who has just been War Secretary and putting him in command at the Admiralty; but we can't have anything of that kind here. We're not going to have Aldershot dictate to us. Besides, man, do you think we didn't debate and discuss all these and a hundred other proposals before we hit upon this compromise?"

"That seems a most excellent pigeon-pie—may I help myself?" he remarked to his hostess—and that was all his answer.

"And that reminds me," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "that we ought to hear at Gloucester to-night whether Mr. Duncombe is coming. I am sure we owe a great deal to him for all the trouble he took about this boat. He was most indefatigable—you would have thought he was planning the whole expedition for himself."

"Yes, Madam," one said to her, "you ought to be most grateful to him. It's all very well for you now—here you are in fine summer weather—windows open—beautiful scenery all around you—and so on. I can tell you it was a very different thing last January—up at Staines or Kingston—inspecting one melancholy house-boat after another—the ice crackling on the slippery gangboards, one's teeth chattering with the cold. That was what Jack Duncombe did for you ——"

"Yes, but we are not ungrateful, are we, Peggy?" she observed, making a bold appeal.

"I hope not," the younger person answered.

"And I am only sorry he has not seen this beautiful Severn *along* with us. Perhaps the Kennet may make it up to him."

She seemed very certain that Jack Duncombe would come

back to the boat; and there was this to be said for her conviction that, if he could get away at all, he would assuredly try to join our party now, for he had always been curious to see how the craft he had helped to construct would behave in the open waters of the Severn. But we had no idea that we were to see him so soon. On this still golden evening we were quietly gliding on towards Gloucester, when Captain Columbus —who was far away along the tow-path (a favourite habit of his when he was not wanted on board)—was seen to stop and speak to a stranger.

"Fancy Columbus meeting an acquaintance in this out-of-the-way neighbourhood!" Queen Tita exclaimed. And then she looked—and looked again. "Why, I declare it is Mr. Duncombe! Isn't it, Peggy? It must be!"

The waving of a pocket-handkerchief put the matter beyond doubt. And then, in the course of a few minutes, the Horse-Marine, recognising the situation and observing a part of the bank where we could easily get alongside, stopped his horse; the bow of the Nameless Barge was quietly run in among the reeds and bushes; the gangboard shoved out; and Jack Duncombe—in boating flannels, and with a small blue cap on his head—and yet nevertheless having a curious town look about him—at least so it seemed to us—stepped on board, and was cheerfully welcomed by the women folk, and introduced to Colonel Cameron. Yes; there was a town look about his complexion that one had hardly noticed before—somehow suggestive of cigarettes, and lemon-squash, and the scribbling of farces. But he was apparently in the brightest of spirits; his clear intelligent grey eyes showed how glad he was of this friendly welcome; while the way he glanced round the boat seemed almost to imply a sense of ownership.

"And you didn't get my telegram at Tewkesbury?" said he.

"We never thought of asking for telegrams," Queen Tita made answer; "we were too much engaged in watching the people pumping the water out of their houses."

"Oh," said he, "I thought you must have been washed away somewhere—I hardly ever expected to hear of you again. Did

you see the newspapers? No, I suppose not. Why, there was nothing but gales and storms and floods—many a time I wondered how you liked the Forest of Arden in that kind of weather."

"I can assure you," said she, "we had nothing to complain of in the way of weather ——"

"Ah, you are used to the West Highlands," he remarked in his offhand way.

Well, now, if he had not been a newcomer, and therefore to be welcomed, he might have been made to suffer for that imprudent speech; but she only said—

"There is Peggy, who has never been in the West Highlands—what do you say, Peggy?"

"I think it has been just beautiful and delightful, all the way through," that young lady said promptly. "We had some rain, of course, now and again; but we didn't seem to mind it. What I remember is just beautiful."

"And you got through the tunnels all right?"

"Oh, don't speak of that—that was too dreadful," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a shudder. "Thank goodness, we are to have no more of them! Nothing on earth would induce me to go through those horrible places again."

"I see you have suffered a little in the wars," he continued, glancing along the roof and the sides of the boat. "You'll have to lie up somewhere for repairs. Of course you must look very smart, before you make your appearance in a gay and fashionable place like Bath."

"But wait a bit, my young friend," the steersman put in; "what's this you are saying about Bath? Is the Thames and Severn Canal blocked?"

"I have been making inquiries," answered this diligent youth, "since I came to Gloucester, and I rather fancy it is. However, I will get to know more to-night or to-morrow morning. But anyhow, why shouldn't you go down to Bristol? It will be ever so much better fun. I should like to see her go ploughing after a steam-launch."

"*Thank* you," said Queen Tita, with much dignity; "I, for *one, have* had enough of steam-launches."

"Oh, that was going through the tunnels," said he, with perfect good-humour; "whereas this will be in the open. There won't be any danger—not much, at all events. If she should begin to do anything we can howl to the people on board the steam-launch, and they'll 'stop her, back her,' and pick us up. It's quite simple."

"It's quite simple," complained Miss Peggy, "to have all our things sunk in the middle of the Severn!"

"And if we are to be towed down by a steam-launch," Mrs. Threepenny-bit asked again, "what is to be done with the horse?'

"The Horse-Marine must take him on to Bristol by road," said he.

"By road?" she answered, quickly, as if some new idea had suddenly occurred to her. "Peggy, don't you think you would like a little driving-trip?—we could get a landau that would take all the things we wanted to make sure of——"

But here our Colonel interfered at once.

"No, no," said he, "that will never do. There must be no deserters. If you will answer for the navigation of the ship, Mr. Duncombe, I will be responsible for the behaviour of the passengers."

"As for that," said Duncombe, "I don't mind being made answerable for anything; but I think it's a wholesome rule, when there is anything doubtful going to be done with a boat, to put the responsibility on the owner of her. He ought to be in charge——"

"And he's going to be," observed the person concerned. "Don't you make any mistake about that."

And yet the notion about driving seemed to linger in Mrs. Threepenny-bit's small brain.

"Peggy," she said, "what do you say about that landau?"

Miss Peggy glanced at Colonel Cameron—but instantly lowered her eyes, for he happened to be looking her way.

"Oh, no," said she, modestly, "the passengers must be obedient—we must all stay by the ship."

In the clear evening skies there were long lines of faintly russet cloud—parallel they mostly were, as if they had been left there by some receding sea—when we came in sight of the

square tower and four turrets of Gloucester Cathedral rising above the wide meadows, with a background of purple, low-lying hills beyond. And now the question was whether we should go on to the town and endeavour to get into the basin of the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal, or remain for the night out here in the rural quiet.

"And your luggage, Mr. Duncombe?" Queen Tita asked, for she knew that people don't drop down from the clouds in a suit of boating flannels.

"Of course I took my things to a hotel," said he. "When I got your invitation, I knew I should be a fifth wheel to the coach—only it was too tempting—and then I said to myself that I could easily stop at a hotel whenever there was a chance ——"

"You shall do nothing of the kind," said she—for she is a hospitable kind of creature in her way, "that is, if you will put up with the discomfort of a bed in the saloon ——"

"And if you would take my berth, and give me the bed in the saloon," Colonel Cameron interposed, "then I know you'd hate me less ——"

"Not at all," said the younger man, with a good-natured laugh. "I am the one who ought to apologise for coming here to disturb a happy family. And to-night, to show you bear me no ill-will, you're all coming to dine with me at my hotel ——"

"Mr. Duncombe!" his hostess protested. "This boat is provisioned for any length of time ——"

"But the dinner is ordered," said he; "and the room; and I have got what you haven't got—some fresh flowers. So I suggest you should leave the boat at some convenient place just outside the town, and we can walk up to the hotel. And then," continued this shifty young man, "you might put a few things in your dressing-bags—just now, I mean—and if you found you would rather stay the night at the hotel, you could send for them. It seems a pity to have to turn out late at night, and make your way down to the river."

"And how late do you expect us to remain your guests, Mr. Duncombe?" Mrs. Threepenny-bit inquired, mildly.

"In Gloucester," said he, "no one ever goes to bed before twelve; but two is the fashionable hour."

"Then I am afraid we shall have to be very unfashionable. But come along, Peggy, and we will get some things ready—for no one knows how the time passes when men begin to smoke."

"They don't seem to know, anyway—that is their good-fortune," remarked Miss Peggy; and forthwith these two disappeared.

And very gay this little dinner-party proved to be, when we were all assembled in the small sitting-room that Jack Duncombe had engaged; the table was bright and cheerful with flowers and wax-candles; and the banquet a good deal more sumptuous than the modest repasts to which we were accustomed on board our boat. Perhaps, too, Queen Tita—if she were still cherishing certain dark designs—was pleased to observe that the young man's position as host gave him a certain importance, and enabled him to display all his best points of manners. One could not help imagining that Miss Peggy was eyeing him a little critically—though surely that brief absence could not have transformed him into a stranger.

But what puzzled one of us most was this—how was it that he, who had left us in a most perturbed and anxious frame of mind, should now on his return be in the blithest of moods? He declared that the invitation we had sent him had reached him at the most opportune moment, but that, if it had not reached him at all, he would have come uninvited, and begged to be taken on board as a day-passenger, shifting for himself at nights. So there was here no making up of any quarrel or the removal of any misunderstanding. On the contrary, he conducted himself just as if he had come once more among old friends; and he was most anxious to please; he brought with him all the gossip of the town, and news of the larger world, too, which we had missed for many a day. And always, we noticed, our garrulous and vivacious host, when he had to address himself to Sir Ewen Cameron, did so with a certain deference which became the younger man very well; and Inverfask—who acted the part mostly of a good-humoured listener—was very civil in return. Peggy also was a listener.

The talk was chiefly kept up between Queen Tita and her young protégé, who was clearly in high favour to-night. And as for wandering away out in the dark to find the Nameless Barge, Jack Duncombe had already taken that matter into his own hands by ordering rooms for all of us in the hotel.

Yes, this was rather a festive evening—although Miss Peggy was without her banjo; for a little later on, when cigars had been lit, Jack Duncombe—who had been educated in Germany—proposed to compound for us a bowl of Maitrank, as appropriate to the season of the year; but Colonel Cameron offering instead to brew some Scotch toddy, as a much wholesomer mixture, Queen Tita unhesitatingly declared for the latter; and whisky, hot water, sugar, lemons, and the like, were forthwith sent for. It cannot honestly be said that our potations were deep; but the steaming odour of this unaccustomed beverage—here in this southern land—seemed to awaken memories; and very soon Mrs. Threepenny-bit was telling us of all her maddening difficulties as a housekeeper in far northern wilds—thirty-three mortal miles from any baker's or butcher's shop; while Sir Ewen came in with his experiences of shooting-lodges from the other point of view—that is to say, the point of view of a guest who has to take his chance. We did not sit up till two; no, nor yet to half-past twelve; but it was a merry evening.

And at the end of it, in her own room, Mrs. Threepenny-bit made these remarks:

"Well, I am exceedingly glad Mr. Duncombe has come back; and I thought he showed to very great advantage to-night, didn't you? And Peggy has eyes—she must see. Of course, he was much too profuse with his entertainment—ridiculously so, for a young man; but I am hardly sorry. It would remind her of his circumstances."

"And you think she was impressed by borrowed silver candlesticks, and fruit, and flowers? It seemed to me she was a good deal more interested in hearing how we managed to live on blue hares and brown trout at Corrie-na-linnhe, that week the horse fell lame."

"As I said before," she continued, "I wouldn't for a moment compare Mr. Duncombe with Colonel Cameron. Certainly not. But in Mr. Duncombe's case, if her fancy was turned his way, everything would be most propitious and satisfactory; and we should have nothing to blame ourselves with. She must see that, too; she has as much common sense as anyone. And I really do think that Mr. Duncombe showed to great advantage to-night."

"But look here," one ventured to say to her, "even supposing that Peggy's fancy were to turn his way—either seriously or for mere devilment—are you quite so sure that Jack Duncombe would respond? All the time he was with us before he seemed impervious enough. Whatever else he is—and I think he is a well-intentioned young fellow, clever, too, and amusing in a half-cynical sort of way—there's not much sentiment about him. Mightn't your beloved Peggy find him rather a tough subject?"

She wheeled round at this.

"Why, even as a piece of mischief, do you think if Peggy were setting her mind to it she couldn't make a hash of him in half-a-dozen hours? She did it before; but she dropped it—he gave in too easily, and then she loses interest. If there were no more serious possibility with regard to Colonel Cameron, I should have no anxiety in the matter; but it isn't her usual tricks this time; it is something entirely different—indeed, it is she herself who seems attracted and impressed, and that in a very curious sort of way. However, if any madness of the kind has got into her brain, the contrast between these two—as regards their age and their circumstances and all that—must certainly strike her. Even if she doesn't take up with Mr. Duncombe—I am sure I don't want her to take up with anybody, while she is under my care—still, the distraction of his being here will be useful and wholesome. And really he showed very well to-night."

There was nothing further to be said. When the sacred oaks and the doves have spoken, the rest of the world is silent.

CHAPTER XX.

"Eagerly once her gracious ken
Was turned upon the sons of men;
But light the serious visage grew—
She looked, and smiled, and saw them through.
* * * * *
"Yet show her once, ye Heavenly Powers,
One of some worthier race than ours!
One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.
* * * * *
"And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry: *Long, long I've looked for thee!*"

THERE was much business to be got through on the following morning; and we were rather glad to have the women-folk taken off our hands by Colonel Cameron, who volunteered to escort them on an exploration of the antiquities of Gloucester. They wanted to find out the beautiful old house in Westgate-street which is well known to artists and architects. They wanted to visit the ruins of Llanthony Priory—probably with some vague idea that this was Landor's Llanthony. They wanted to see the great Cathedral and its monuments: perhaps, Queen Tita wistfully suggested, the choir might be singing. And so we beheld them go away; and blessed them; and betook ourselves to the offices of the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal.

Here we were received with much courtesy; and as a result of our inquiries we resolved not to attempt the navigation of the Stroudwater and Thames and Severn canals, but to go down the Severn to Bristol. The fact is, we had all the way through had a kind of sneaking wish to make this attempt, even supposing the other route were practicable; and we rather wished to be persuaded that it was Bristol we ought to make for.

Accordingly we were furnished with letters of introduction to the authorities at Sharpness Point, who would advise us as to the best means of getting through the open waters; and being so equipped we had now but to bring the Nameless Barge along to the commodious basin, where were lying ships and steamers of every description and size. Captain Columbus performed this office with his usual business-like self-confidence; but Murdoch looked a little bit shy as the toy-boat came along. Beside these massive hulks—in the midst of all this bustle and activity—there is no doubt the Nameless Barge had the appearance of having been brought out of the window of a fancy repository. And so the idlers about seemed to think. They crowded down to the berth which we secured for her; and stared, and examined, and discussed. No such craft had ever been in this place before, we were pretty sure of that. But then Murdoch had adroitly drawn together the small red curtains of the windows on the landward side; and so, when Mrs. Threepenny-bit and her young American friend at length appeared, they escaped with ease from the curiosity of these good people into the security of the saloon, where they remained while we were getting the boat slowly and miscellaneously rowed and pushed and pulled past the great overtowering vessels to reach the mouth of the canal.

What kind of a day was it when we started? Well, it was the kind of a day that keeps weather prophets, of a prudent turn, quiet. We might have rejoiced in this burning and brilliant sunlight that shone on the wide and riverlike waters, on the winding pathway, and the hedges and woods and slopes; but that all of these things derived much of their extraordinary vividness from the fact that behind them, in the south, were heavy masses of purple-black storm-cloud, forming an admirable but ominous background. We affected to ignore that louring distance. Here around us everything was perfect; the air summer-like and sweet; the smooth water mirroring the blue and white of the overhead sky; the sunlight warm on Peggy's golden-brown hair. Moreover, there seemed to prevail a certain sensation of freedom and largeness as we got further and

further along. This canal was of much greater size than those to which we had been accustomed; and the craft we encountered were not the ordinary long, slow-moving, silent boats, but sea-going vessels of all kinds, with life and briskness everywhere visible. Quite imposing was one stately procession of three brigantines, two schooners, a sloop, and two picturesquely laden barges that glided quietly by, headed by a noisy little steamer. Indeed, as nearly all the traffic on this ship-canal is governed by steam-power, we had almost a monopoly of the tow-path, and so got along without trouble.

Mr. Jack Duncombe seemed very well pleased to be back among us, and was gay and talkative; his facetiousness chiefly taking the form of magnifying the possible dangers of that trip down the open Severn to which we were now definitely pledged. Perhaps he meant to show that this part of the expedition was as important as the passage of the tunnels, which he had missed; perhaps he was so sure of the sea-worthiness of the boat that he could afford to scoff; but in any case he entirely failed to terrify his hostess—if that was his aim.

"Oh, no," said she, with decision, "whatever may happen to the rest of you, Peggy and I will be safe. I am not going to take the opinion of any of you gentlemen; I am going to take the opinion of a professional seaman; I am going to ask Murdoch whether we should make the venture. And if he is in any way doubtful, then there is the landau for Peggy and me; and you may as well keep an eye on us as we are driving along the road, for when we see you sinking we should like to wave a handkerchief, by way of good-bye. It isn't for myself," she continued, placidly, "that I care so much; but I am responsible for Peggy. The United States might do something awful to me if she was drowned while under my charge. They might summon me to the Bar of the House of Representatives—I suppose they have a bar ——"

"Trust them!" said Jack Duncombe, but we didn't know *what* he meant.

"Then they'll say, 'Where is Margaret Rosslyn?' 'My *lords* and gentlemen'—I suppose this is what I shall have to

say—'please, she went down in a stupid old house-boat that tried to get along the Severn.' 'Away with her to the dungeons'—that's what they'll say to me—'and feed her on iced water and canvas-back duck that haven't been cooked.' Oh, no; I'm not going to run any such risk. I will take Murdoch's opinion; and if he is at all doubtful, then it's a landau for Peggy and me—and we'll watch you from a convenient distance."

At this moment Miss Peggy came out into the sunlight: she had been adorning the saloon with the flowers that had done duty on the dinner-table at the hotel the night before. Moreover, she had made bold to appropriate to herself a few white hyacinths; and the little bouquet looked very well on her dress of dark blue serge.

"Come here, you American girl," Queen Tita says to her, and takes hold of her by the arm, and makes room for her by her side; "do you know that I am responsible for your safety? —and now that these people have determined to go down the Severn in this cockle-shell of a thing, the question is whether I am going to allow you to remain on board."

"I though that was all settled," observes Miss Peggy, rather appealing to Colonel Cameron.

"It is not all settled," Mrs. Threepenny-bit makes answer. "I will not permit of any foolhardiness; and unless I can be assured that there is not the slightest danger, you and I will put ourselves into a carriage and get down to Bristol on good solid land. And I am not going to take any vague assurances; I am going to have a professional opinion; I am going to consult Murdoch ——"

"Oh, Murdoch?" says Miss Peggy, quickly

"Yes; although he is a steward, he has been a sailor, too, all his life; and unless he thinks we may safely run the risk, then ashore we go."

"Oh, yes—very well—I agree to that," remarks Miss Peggy—and why should she again glance towards Sir Ewen Cameron—this time with a kind of smile in her eyes? "I will hold myself bound by Murdoch's opinion—certainly."

"Why, Miss Rosslyn," Inverfask interposes, with a touch of reproach, "you promised to stay by the ship!"

"But I am not going to allow her to run into any danger," Queen Tita says in her peremptory fashion. "I have got to restore her safe and sound to the United States—and much good may they get out of such a piece of baggage!"

So on this brilliant and shining day (for we would rather not look at that black wall of cloud in the south) we got on by Rea Bridge and Quedgley and Hardwicke even unto Whitminster, where is the junction with the Stroudwater Canal. But we did not stay to make inquiries as to the practicability of getting back to the Thames by this route; we had signed our articles, as it were, and were bound for Bristol; the allurements of the Avon and the Kennet, among other considerations, had proved too potent. So we continued our placid voyage; and so fair and shining and beautiful was the country around us that we pretended not to know that a breeze had sprung up, and that those mighty masses of purple cloud were advancing, heralded by a few rags and shreds of silvery white.

The storm burst while we were all inside and leisurely seated at lunch. It had been growing darker and darker for some time before; but we had hardly noticed it; for we were listening to Jack Duncombe's recital of his experiences on the production of his one and only piece, and our imaginations were away in the region of the lamp-lit Strand. But all of a sudden there was a sound that recalled us to our actual surroundings—a smart rattle as of buckshot on the forward window; and then we became aware that the world without was steeped in an unusual and mysterious gloom. The next moment the tempest broke upon us with a roar—a continuous thunder of rain and hail and ice that battered on the roof, and hurled itself against the windows with an appalling fury. We could guess that the sudden gale was tearing the water around us into a white smoke; but we could see nothing; for the panes were steaming with the half-melted ice and hailstones. Then, *in the midst* of all this bewilderment of noise, there was a *sharper* crack—as if a pistol had been fired just outside.

"Why, what's that?" cried Jack Duncombe, jumping up and making forward.

"Here, don't open that window!" one had to call to him. 'Do you want to swamp the whole place? Leave the hurricane alone; it isn't meddling with you."

But what was this now? The Nameless Barge was going more slowly. Then it touched something—gently. Then it stopped altogether.

"I know what it is!" said that young man, triumphantly. "The tow-rope has broken, and Murdoch has run the boat alongside the bank."

This seemed probable enough; but it was no reason why Queen Tita should exclaim, "How provoking!" and one was called upon to rebuke that infinitesimal creature for her unreasonable impatience.

"Go on with your lunch," one says to her, "and be quiet, and leave Murdoch and Captain Columbus to patch up the rope between them. 'How provoking,' indeed! Don't you know that we have a Philosopher on board this boat? If you would only listen to her teaching she would show you that, instead of grumbling over the tow-rope breaking now for the first time, you should be filled with joy because it did not break before. Don't you remember the solemn warning —— gave us before we started? 'You are going to certain misery,' he said, 'if you propose to tow a house-boat all over England; for the tow-rope will be continually breaking, and the driver continually getting drunk.' What has happened? The driver has never got drunk at all—the tow-rope now breaks for the first time. If you had any wisdom in you—if you would only listen to the teaching of the great Philosopher whom we have engaged for this voyage—you would rather rejoice that we had come all this way without any such mishap."

"And who is the Philosopher?" she demands.

"Me," says Peggy, abasing herself in bad grammar.

"And who authorised you to interfere with the affairs of this boat?"

"Please I never did anything of the kind!"

"Ah, it's just like him to trump up charges against innocent people. Mr. Duncombe, don't you trouble; the men will make everything right. Come back to your place; we all want to hear how the battle ended between you and the hysterical mamma."

Well, the storm—or prolonged squall, rather—after bellowing about our ears as if it meant to blow us out of the water, ceased about as suddenly as it had begun; there was a burst of warm sunlight all around, insomuch that the forward window was thrown open, letting the mild, sweet air blow freely in; and presently we became aware, from the motion of the boat, that the people on the bank had got the line mended and were again moving forward. We finished our luncheon in peace; and Jack Duncombe came to an end of his adventures on that fateful night at the theatre.

When we went outside, we found a most tempestuous-looking scene around us. Far away in the west the Monmouthshire hills were still steeped in a sombre gloom; but the hills in the east were swept by flying rain-clouds, followed by bursts of sunlight that produced a rainbow on the soft grey background. And if the colours of the landscape had been vivid before, they were now keener than ever in this dazzling radiance; the very sedges and willows beside us were all shimmering in the silvery wet. There was a brisk breeze blowing, too—a stimulating sort of breeze, that seemed to suggest our fighting our way against it—as, indeed, we very soon were. For we found that the tow-path here offered excellent walking; so we all got ashore, Jack Duncombe and Queen Tita leading the way through this whirling and changing world of showers and flying clouds and sunlight.

"Colonel Cameron," said Miss Peggy, with a certain demure air, "didn't you say that the Highlanders were so courteous that usually they would try to answer you as they thought you wanted to be answered?"

"They have a tendency that way—and I don't blame them. *Why* do you ask?" said he.

"*Because* I don't think we shall have any need of a landau *to-morrow*."

"I—I don't quite understand," said he.

"Didn't you say there should be no deserters from the ship—when we go down to Bristol?" she asked, still with her eyes on the ground.

"Well, it would be a pity, wouldn't it?" he answered her. "Why not see the thing through? You are not afraid, I know; and I understood you to say you meant to keep by the boat. Oh, yes; I distinctly think we should hang together ——"

"Don't you mean drown together?" she asked, meekly.

"If it comes to that, yes. My own opinion is that there won't be the slightest danger of any kind."

"But you belong to the army; whereas it is a naval expert who is to be called in," Miss Peggy continued. "And—and I thought you looked a little surprised to-day when I consented to abide by his judgment. Then you had forgotten what you told me about the Highlanders?"

And still this tall, long-striding, sandy-moustached Colonel didn't perceive what she was driving at.

"I think I know what Murdoch's opinion will be," she observed, modestly.

And then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Excellent, excellent! You are going to tell him beforehand that you are anxious to remain in the boat; and then you will ask him whether you should or not? Very skilful—very ingenious!"

"Do you think so?" interposed the fifth of these pedestrians (all of them struggling forward against this fresh-blowing wind). "We will see about that. If there is to be a court of inquiry, there shall be no subornation of witnesses. Murdoch—if he is consulted at all, which is extremely improbable—will be asked to give a perfectly free and unbiassed judgment."

"Murdoch is a friend of mine," she said, darkly; and that ended the matter for the moment.

Presently Queen Tita called aloud—

"Peggy, come along! Here is something for you."

These two ahead had come to a halt at a corner of the winding tow-path · and when we overtook them we perceived the

reason why. In the great valley now opening before them lay the wide bed of the Severn river—here and there showing long banks of yellow sand, and here and there narrower channels of lapping water of similar hue. Which was the main body of the stream we could hardly make out—water and sand seemed in many places to lose themselves in each other.

"Well," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "doesn't it remind you?"

"Of what?" asked Miss Peggy.

"Why, of the Missouri at Council Bluffs!" she exclaimed. "I thought you would see the likeness at once—those great mud-banks and the yellow water. I thought your loyal heart would leap up—that we should see tears of gladness in your eyes ——"

"But I never saw the Missouri anywhere," remarked Miss Peggy, innocently.

"What!—you never were at Omaha?"

"No, never."

"Well, you are a pretty American ——!"

"Yes, that's just what she is," one ventured to observe, merely by way of defending the poor thing.

"A pretty American you are! Never saw the Missouri! I wonder if you ever heard of the Capitol at Washington?"

"As for that," rejoined Miss Peggy, "I know of somebody who has lived all her life in England, and never went to Stratford-on-Avon till the year before last."

"I consider you a very impertinent young person," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with much dignity; and therewith she turned to her former companion, and they resumed their walk and talk.

But what was of more importance than any fancied likeness to the Missouri was the question whether that great extent of sand and yellow water gave us any indication of what we might expect further down; for, in that case, there seemed to be little to cause serious apprehension. Even with this brisk breeze blowing up against the stream, there was nothing of a sea on; and, as far as we could judge, the worst that might happen to us would be our grounding on a sandbank; which would be

annoying enough, but not necessarily dangerous. The steersman of the steam-launch would know the proper channel; and what could be simpler than to follow submissively in his wake? So we comforted ourselves; and Miss Peggy assured Colonel Cameron—there seemed to be an excellent understanding between these two—that she would easily manage Murdoch.

When at length we got down to Sharpness Docks we did not go into any of the great basins, but remained in one of the connecting water-ways, where we found a snug berth, and where there was a chain ferry-boat, by which we could cross to the other side when we wished. We left the women-folk to make themselves beautiful for dinner, and set out to prosecute inquiries. The evening was more placid now, and though there was still a stormy look about the western skies, we still hoped for a quiet day for our adventure of the morrow.

We very soon found, however, that the task of obtaining information was no easy one. For one thing, the Sharpness Docks extend over a wide area; and while it was next to impossible to explain to the people what nondescript kind of craft this was that we had brought along, we could not encroach on their good-nature by asking them to leave their homes or duties to come and look at it—not that night at least. But on one point we had absolute assurance; there was no steam-launch here available. There had been one quite recently; but it had left. Might there be one over at Lydney? Perhaps. If the worst came to the worst, we could telegraph to Bristol to have one sent up? Certainly. What would that cost? No one knew. They seemed to think it rather an insensate thing that we should have come hither with a boat that had neither steam nor sails, and that couldn't even be rowed; but our chief consideration was that we *were* here; and had no sort of intention of going back. When we returned to the Nameless Barge with our report (it was half-past eight by this time; the saloon was all lit up, and dinner waiting) Miss Peggy promptly said:

"But supposing you can't get any steam-launch, why shouldn't the boat be allowed to float down with the stream? I suppose she would hit upon the sandbanks here or there, but

you could shove her off, and she would make her way herself. Isn't that practicable?"

"Oh, yes," responded Jack Duncombe, at once. "It is quite practicable. And it would be a gay performance at first, to go waltzing along like that. But it would be rather awkward lower down. Do you know that the Severn is about six miles wide down there? I dare say if we bobbed about for a month or two, we should eventually get blown into the mouth of the Avon."

"What do you say, Mr. Duncombe?" cried Queen Tita. "Six miles wide? Why, it's the open sea! And we are going out into it in a thing like *this?*"

"But think of the heroism of it!" said he. "Why, they will put up a statue to you in Bristol, as the first person who ever went down the Severn in a wooden shanty."

"The wooden shanty," said she, solemnly, "will take the form of a carriage on four wheels; and it will go along a sound, respectable, Christian highway. What do you say, Peggy?"

Miss Peggy glanced towards Colonel Cameron—who also was regarding her; but the entrance of Murdoch relieved her from the necessity of answering, and presently dinner was going forward.

And again this evening the young gentleman who had just returned to us maintained that extraordinary vivacity which was in such marked contrast to the dolorous mood in which he had left us. Nay, he was nearly incurring his hostess's displeasure by his recklessness; for she, having remarked that it would be an interesting thing to know from people which historical character they most admired—or would themselves have chosen to be—he said instantly—

"I know who I should like to have been—the Earl of Rochester".

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh," said he, carelessly, "he had a merry time of it—he was drunk for five years at a stretch."

"*Colonel* Cameron," said she, with severe reserve, "I hope *you will* choose some respectable person."

"I? Well, I really don't know," Sir Ewen made answer. "I've always had a great admiration for the old northern warrior who was quite willing to be converted to Christianity until he happened to ask where his forefathers were: you know the story."

"But I don't," said Miss Peggy, in her usual prompt way.

"When the Bishop told him his forefathers were in hell, Radbod immediately drew back from the font: where his forefathers were, there he would go. I forget the precise words; but it was rather a fine speech—don't you think so?"

The Chief Inquisitor turned to Miss Peggy—

"You, Peggy?"

The answer came without a moment's hesitation.

"I should like to have been Flora Macdonald," she said.

"But wait a bit, Miss Rosslyn," Jack Duncombe interposed. "Are you quite sure you can call Flora Macdonald a historical character?"

"Certainly," Colonel Cameron answered for her. "Undoubtedly. Miss Macdonald was flung into the Tower. Now, it is only historical characters that are 'flung' anywhere. Unmistakably she was a historical character."

"It is so strange to hear you speak of her as Miss Macdonald," said Miss Peggy, thoughtfully—though we did not quite perceive how this little peculiarity should have impressed her.

Now, it was not to this chance mention of Flora Macdonald, nor yet to any resuscitation of Jack Duncombe's Alfieri project, that we owed the reintroduction of the subject of Prince Charles Edward—which had already played so important a part in the conduct of this expedition. Biscuits was the much more prosaic cause. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in her capacity of universal provider, had purchased for us some tins of oatmeal biscuits, for which she has a particular fancy; and when one of those was now produced and opened, there was some promiscuous talk about the qualities of oatmeal in general, which Mr. Duncombe seemed to regard as a merry topic. Inverfask, on the other hand, was saying that, if it were true that oatmeal was a non-fattening, bone-producing form of food, then it was

strange that Prince Charlie, who must have lived on little else during most of his wanderings in the Highlands, should have thriven so well on it that when he escaped over to France, his own brother hardly recognised him, so stout had he grown. So here we were back at the Young Chevalier again; and forthwith Mrs. Threepenny-bit said—with inadvertent encouragement—

"He was quite a slim young man when he landed in Scotland, wasn't he?"

"Yes, tall and slim, but with a wiry and muscular figure, and with a most princely carriage—I think that must have helped him greatly in winning over those poor Highlanders to his cause. And then," he continued (for was he not well aware of Miss Peggy's romantic interest in these matters?), "he had left nothing undone to fit him for the part he was to play. He did not want to come amongst the clansmen as a foreign Prince; he tried hard to make himself a Highlander; even before he landed he had trained himself in their athletic sports—the use of the broadsword as well; and then, when he was amongst them, he was indefatigable in interesting himself in their ways and family histories and traditions—and in picking up any old custom ——"

"There was one of their old customs he managed to pick up," Jack Duncombe said, with a laugh; "he was a powerful potationist."

"Drinking was common among the gentlemen of the time," Cameron said, briefly; "and there may have been an occasional bout or two—magnified afterwards by the people who took part in it. But Charles Edward was by nature and habit notoriously an abstemious young man. Why, do you think a person given to drink could have gone through such physical fatigue and endured such privations as he had to encounter? When he was marching with his troops into England—on foot, as he always was, at the head of this or that regiment—talking to the men, and cheering them on—they weren't very sorry when something happened to his shoe, for then they got the pace moderated a little. Look at his endurance among the hills," Sir Ewen went on. "For nearly a whole week he lived on a

quarter of a peck of oatmeal; and all the while sleeping in holes or caves, on the bare rock frequently. The whole party were actually starving when they chanced on the Glenmorriston men; and they brought the Glenmorriston men near to starvation too—until they managed to shoot a stag, and that they had to eat without bread or salt. I wonder if any king's son ever before had to suffer such hard discipline; very likely it may have been the plain living and the constant exercise that made him look so stout and well when he returned to France."

"Almost thou persuadest me that he was rather a fine fellow," Jack Duncombe said, quite good-humouredly. "But you can't get over the last years of his life."

"The last years of his life?" Colonel Cameron repeated. "Well, I know the story. And I don't like to recall it. They say that his miseries and disappointments had turned his brain. Long before he went to Florence his conduct had become quite inexplicable: people couldn't even find out where he was. But surely, when a man's life-history is so far away from us as that, it is kinder and wiser to think of him at his best ——"

"Oh, surely—surely!" said Queen Tita—for that furious mite of a partisan had been listening in rather a breathless way.

"It is not a great piece of charity to extend to anyone," Sir Ewen continued—he knew these women-folk were on his side. "And at his best young Charles Stuart was a brave and gallant Prince, eager, generous, and filled with enthusiasm in what he considered a just and loyal enterprise—that was to win the Crown of England, not for himself, but for his father. Aytoun says that if the clan-system of the Highlands was doomed, it was better it should go out in a blaze of romantic splendour rather than die merely of inanition. Well, that may be so. Yet I can't help remembering that many a poor Highlander had to pay dear for that brilliant historical episode; and indeed I wish that Lochiel had taken Fassiefern's advice, and stayed away altogether, or else gone to meet the Prince with a firm and unalterable 'No'. But the thing was done; the misery and suffering are all forgotten now; and who, at this distance of time, can bear any grudge against Charles Edward, or want to think of him except in his

best days? Why, we should rather be grateful to him for all the beautiful music and the pathetic songs that he called into existence. All the finer feeling of Scotland was awakened by his heroic undertaking—the poets themselves couldn't keep from joining his standard. Miss Rosslyn, did you ever hear of the 'Braes of Yarrow'?"

"Oh, yes," the young lady answered, but in a startled way—her eyes had been absent.

"I don't mean Wordsworth's poems—I mean the older ballad—'Busk ye, busk ye, my bonnie, bonnie bride'. That was written by Hamilton of Bangour. Hamilton belonged to an old Ayrshire family, so that clanship feeling had nothing to do with him; a very accomplished person he was, a great favourite, and already making his way to fame; so that he had really everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by joining the Prince; but join the Prince he did. The fascination of the enterprise, I suppose, captivated his mind; I don't know that he had ever met the Prince personally; perhaps he had at Edinburgh—at the Holyrood festivals, when Bonnie Prince Charlie was winning the hearts of all the Scotch ladies ——"

"Was Mr. Hamilton killed?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, no. He escaped to France, like so many more; and afterwards he was pardoned, and even got his estates back. The Government were as lenient as could fairly have been expected—though some examples had to be made. Well, I wish they had spared old Lord Balmerino," he continued, in this careless, rambling way; "he was a splendid old fellow: however, if there was anyone who didn't seem to mind, it was Balmerino himself. Then there was old Malcolm Macleod, who was guide to Prince Charlie in a great part of his wanderings; they ran no great risk in letting him off, though Malcolm was proud enough of the triumphant way in which he got back to his own country. When Miss Macdonald was set free, she was asked to choose an attendant to accompany her on her journey to the North; and she chose old Malcolm; so that he used ever after to say, 'Well, I went up to London to be hanged—and came back in a braw post-chaise with Miss Flora Macdonald!'"

And how did Mrs. Threepenny-bit take all this talk about these half-forgotten things; and how did she regard the keen and sympathetic interest that Miss Peggy so obviously displayed? It is to be feared that, fiercely Jacobite as she was in her sympathies, she was beginning to wish Sir Ewen Cameron back at Aldershot—although it was herself who had insisted on his being summoned hither. To defend the Young Chevalier, and to give Miss Peggy some idea of what a Highland soldier may be like, was all very well; but to capture the young lady's heart (supposing there was any such risk), as well as her imagination, was a very different matter. And again, on this evening, she gave utterance to her fears.

The occasion arose in this way. After dinner, Miss Peggy, drawing aside one of the blinds and peering out, discovered that it was a beautiful starlight night, and proposed that we should all go for a stroll along the bank. The captain of the ship, having to enter up the log, declined. Queen Tita also refused, affecting some dread of the night air. Jack Duncombe, of course, jumped up at once, and offered to be Miss Peggy's escort—which seemed a natural and simple arrangement. But Miss Peggy hesitated. She glanced at Colonel Cameron.

"Sir Ewen," she said, diffidently, "won't you come too? I am sure you will find it quite as pleasant to smoke your cigar outside."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, if I may," said he forthwith: and then she put a scarf round her head and shoulders, and these three went out of the saloon and made their way ashore in the clear dark.

The moment they had gone, Queen Tita laid down the book she was pretending to read.

"Now, can you imagine anything more vexatious than the way that girl is going on!" she exclaimed—though one, perhaps, suspected that a good deal of her annoyance was assumed.

"You mean in asking Colonel Cameron to go out for a bit of a stroll?"

"Not at all. I mean her whole attitude towards him. And Peggy, of all people in the world! Why, she has always

had a kind of scorn of men. She has always found them too pliable—too silly, in short; and has simply amused herself with them—that is, when she wasn't merely indifferent. But now she is as obedient as a lamb; and listens for every word—and I must say that he talks almost entirely to her, openly and unblushingly; and it's 'Sir Ewen says this,' and 'Sir Ewen says that,' as if he were the sole authority in the world. The bit of wood from Fassiefern House you would think she considered a sainted relic; and both of them talk of her visit to Inverfask as being something quite important—nothing in the shape of a call; and not one word has the minx to say about her going back to America. And the worst of it is, she has such a nerve: she is afraid of nothing; if she takes a thing into her head, she'll do it, whatever her people may say."

"But haven't you got Jack Duncombe here to alter all that?" one points out to this schemer.

"She doesn't seem to pay any heed to him!" she answers, rather blankly.

"Send Ewen Cameron away, then."

"I couldn't be rude to him," she says; and then she adds, in a hurt kind of fashion, "Rude—to *him!*"

"Very well; do as you please; but remember this, that if anything should happen through your having insisted on introducing Ewen Cameron to your dearly-beloved Peggy, all your romantic sentiment about Flora Macdonald, and your sympathy for poor Prince Charlie, and the interest attaching to Malcolm Macleod and his post-chaise, and to the Glenmorriston men and their stag, and Hamilton of Bangour, and Holyrood, and Culloden, and Quatre Bras, to say nothing of bushels and sheaves of Jacobite ballads and songs—I tell you, all these things boiled together won't remove the last of the mortgages from the Inverfask estate."

CHAPTER XXI.

"And therewith cast I down mine eyes again,
Whereat I saw, walking under the tower,
Full secretly, now comen here to plain,
The fairest or the freshest younge flower
That e'er I saw, methought, before that hour
For which sudden abate, anon astart
The blood of all my body to my heart."

Now, as our good friend the Harbour-Master was coming along to have a look at the Nameless Barge, it was not likely that the responsible people of the party were going to the ship's steward to get his opinion of her seaworthiness; but Queen Tita had a great faith in Murdoch; and Miss Peggy knew it; and on the first chance the young lady had—which was early the next morning—she set about beguiling and perverting the mind of that simple Highlander. Queen Tita was still in her cabin; Jack Duncombe and the Colonel had gone ashore for a stroll; so there remained but one person to watch this young woman's wiles.

"Murdoch," she said, in her innocent fashion, as she was putting some flowers on the breakfast-table (none of them, the candid observer is compelled to own, half so fresh and bright and pleasant to look at as herself)—"Murdoch, you know we are going down to Bristol?"

Murdoch lingered at the door of the saloon.

"Yes, Mem."

"And that the river is very wide down there?"

"Yes, Mem."

"You don't suppose there is any really serious risk, do you?" she asked in an offhand way (and pretending to be very busy with the flowers).

But at this Murdoch hesitated. Did the young lady wish to be encouraged to go by water, or persuaded to go by land? Then perhaps it may have occurred to him that he might as well tell the simple truth.

"Well, Mem," said he, "I do not know myself; but there wass two or three o' them last night they were saying to me it wass not for five hundred pounds they would go down to Bristol in this boat, if there wass any kind of a preeze from the sous or sou'-west."

Here was a most unexpected blow—even Peggy was a little bit startled.

"What was that?" she said.

"Yes, Mem; that's what they were saying—not for five hundred pounds would they go down the ruvver in this boat."

"It's the landau for you, Miss Peggy," one observed to her. But she was not to be easily turned from her purpose.

"Wait a bit. Murdoch, who were these men?"

"Oh! they were chist men from the docks," he answered.

"Yes; coalheavers and people like that, I suppose! What could they know about a boat like this?"

"Mebbe no mich," said the young Highlander, cautiously —for it was not clear to him as yet which way she wanted him to answer.

"Well," she said; "I wouldn't repeat a foolish speech like that, if I were you. Five hundred pounds!—a lot of babies talking nonsense! How can there be any danger? I don't see any possibility of it!"

And now here was his cue at last; and his answer was forthcoming readily.

"Dancher?" said he. "Oh, no, Mem; there will be no dancher at ahl—no, no, there will be no dancher whateffer!"

"You are quite convinced of that, Murdoch?" she said, dexterously pinning him to his expressed belief.

"Well, Mem," said he, "the Severn is only a ruvver; and she wass on a ruvver before, and did ferry well; and she'll do ferry well again."

This sounded reasonable—though, to be sure, there are rivers and rivers. But Miss Peggy went on to tell him of the proposal that certain members of the party should go by land; and of her own decided opinion that we should all keep together; and in a way appealed to him to confirm her judgment.

"Why, it would be cowardly to leave the others, wouldn't it?" she continued. "And I know—at least I've heard, Murdoch—that you never had any great liking for this boat; but you have seen what she can do; and she has never got us into trouble hitherto. So long as she keeps afloat, what more can we want? Why, I believe she would float well enough if she were on the open sea!"

"At sea, Mem!" said Murdoch, rather aghast.

"Well, what would happen to her?" asked this bold student of nautical matters.

"Pless me, Mem!" he exclaimed, "if there wass any wind at ahl, she would roll about like a tib, and tek in watter, and then she would sunk—ay, in five minutes she would be down."

"Oh, she would roll about like a tub, and then sink?" observed Miss Peggy, thoughtfully. Then she said, in a lighter tone, "Well, Murdoch, it is no use talking about impossibilities. We are only going down to Bristol—down a river, as you say—and it would be a great pity for any of us to leave the others, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes, Mem, a great peety!" said he.

"And you know quite well there won't be any danger," she observed, insidiously.

"Oh, I do not think there will be any dancher at ahl," he repeated.

"And, Murdoch, I wouldn't say a word about that foolish speech you heard last night," she said, by way of closing the interview.

"Ferry well, Mem," Murdoch obediently answered; and went about his duties.

You should have seen her face when he was gone—it was so serene and serious and ingenuous: it was only her eyes that spoke.

"Well, of all ——!"

"All what?" she asks, and there is hardly a smile in those tell-tale eyes.

"To go and bewilder a poor Highland lad ——"

"Don't you know this?" she says—interrupting in her usual unconcerned manner—"that women are weak, helpless

defenceless creatures; and that sometimes, when they have a particular aim in view, they have to use a little judicious skill? But it is always done in innocence. Men, when they deceive, do it for dreadful purposes—crimes and villainies; when women have to exercise a little tact, that is all done in pure innocence——"

"Yes, a very simple, innocent young thing you are!"

"Don't you think I am?" she says, calmly; and she stalks across the saloon and takes her banjo off the peg, and sits down and begins twanging at the strings.

Then this is what one hears:

"When de good ole Gabriel gwine to blow de horn,
You'd better be dar sure as you are born,
For he gwine to wake you early in de morn,
He's a gwine to wake you early in de mornin'."

Then, when she comes to the chorus, she sings alto:

"Den rise, children, sing around de door,
We'll gadder early on de golden shore,
He's a comin' right now, an' he'll come no more,
He's a gwine to meet us early in de mornin'."

Then comes a brisker air:

"It's early in de mornin', before we see the sun,
'Roll aboard dat cotton, and get back in a run!'
De Captain's in a hurry; I know what he means;
Wants to beat de Sherlock, down to New Orleans."

This, also, has a chorus, which she sings with much complacency (and all for her own enjoyment apparently):

"Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Ain't got long to stay!"

"Now what on earth is all this frightful noise about?" demands Mrs. Threepenny-bit, suddenly appearing at the door of the saloon. "And at this time of the morning, too!"

"Well, it isn't Sunday morning," the young lady makes answer. "Besides, he has been saying very rude things about me; and I've taken refuge in music; but it's no use; and I'm

sick and tired of everybody; and this is a hateful world; and I'm going to leave it ——"

"Better not be in a hurry, Miss Peggy," one feels bound to say to her in friendly counsel; "you might change it for a worse.'

"Well, now, that is a nice civil sort of speech to make to anybody—before breakfast—when one's nervous system isn't prepared for shocks," said she; but she was paying most attention to her banjo. Her fingers wandered into another air:

> "O my darling Nelly Gray, they are taking thee away,
> And I'll never see my darling Nelly more ——"

she sang, in soft and tragic tones; and there is no saying how far she might have got with that interesting ballad, but that there was a sound without—the sound of Sir Ewen Cameron's voice in conversation with Jack Duncombe. Instantly she sprang to her feet, whipped the banjo into its case, and hung that up; Queen Tita laughed in her quiet way, but said nothing; and therewithal appeared at the door of the saloon the tall figure of the Highland Colonel, who had managed to get, somewhere or other, two large handfuls of lilac-blossom, both white and purple, that made a most welcome and fragrant addition to Miss Peggy's table-flowers.

Alas! we very soon discovered that it was not on this day, at all events, that we could make any attempt to get down the Severn. When we emerged from our snug retreat, and set out for the scattered hamlet of Sharpness, we found there was half-a-gale blowing briskly up from the W.S.W.; and that all the various craft in the basins were stayed there, windbound. It was a very beautiful morning, no doubt; silver and purple clouds came rolling up through a sapphire-blue sky; the view across the wide waters of the river was striking enough—the yellow waves white-tipped with foam and rushing along the various channels; and the sunlight—after the passing glooms—was extraordinarily vivid on the ruddy banks above the Severn shore and on the green hills beyond. But this brilliant, breezy, almost bewildering day was a landscape-artist's day; it was not a day for taking an unwieldy house-boat down an estuary.

The Harbour-Master at Sharpness was exceedingly kind to

us, and was good enough to come along and inspect the Nameless Barge. In the end he gave it as his opinion that, if we could get a small steamer to tow her down, and had the luck of ordinary quiet weather, we ought to have no great trouble or risk. Then the question arose as to where we should get a steam-launch. Such things don't seem to abound in the West of England; those we could gain any tidings of were all engaged. When we had telegraphed here, there, and everywhere—and in vain—it began to dawn upon us that the mere possibility of danger in getting down the Severn was not the only difficulty we had to face. Supposing we should not be allowed to make the attempt? As this blowy, sunlit morning wore on, hour after hour, matters became more and more serious. It is true, we had plenty to occupy us in the intervals of waiting for answers to our telegrams; for docks and harbours are always interesting; and you may suppose that Miss Peggy was highly pleased to come across a vessel—a full-rigged ship it was—hailing from San Francisco; and that she stood opposite it a very long time indeed, examining it with a kind of loving minuteness, and guessing that the one or two people on deck were countrymen of her own.

Luncheon-time arrives, and we are still in this unpleasant quandary.

"It will be horribly ignominious to be turned back, after we have got so far," Queen Tita says, in sorrowing tones. "And then where could we make for? I remember some very pretty districts farther north—we see them from the London and North-Western Line every time we go to Scotland—and these have a canal winding through them; but then, to get to them, I suppose we should have to face those horrible tunnels again ——"

"You may put that idea out of your small head," one informs her. "We are not going back at all; we are going forward. Even if this blessed boat has to be put on a waggon, and taken down by road, it's Bristol she has got to get to—somehow."

"And that would be practicable enough," says Jack Duncombe. "You could get a lorry, and have her fixed on that."

"And we could live on board all the same?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Yes, and be taken for a company of maniacs!" her hostess says, scornfully; and then she continues: "How was it no one foresaw this difficulty?"

"Well, considering that the whole expedition was an experiment, how was any part of it to be foreseen?"

"And what are our chances now?" she demands.

"Our chances now are reduced to one. There is in this flourishing community a general dealer, who owns a share in a steam-launch—I believe that is how the matter stands—which steam-launch is now at Bristol. Very well: he thinks she is hired till the end of next week, and in that case she is of no use to us; but he has telegraphed to inquire, and we shall have the answer in due course. If that last chance fails, then there is nothing for it but to lift this boat out of the water, and give her a cruise on wheels."

"Then ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road; but I'll be in Bristol before ye," she observes in a flippant manner. One could almost imagine that she is secretly rejoicing over the probability of her escape from that water-journey.

"In the meantime," one says to her, "we are going along to have a look at the Severn Railway Bridge, and to inspect the machinery of the Swing-bridge over the ship-canal. And as we shall have to climb to the top of the tower by an outside ladder of iron, overhanging the river, I suppose you giddy young things won't care to come with us. A person who shut her eyes all the time she was going up the Righi railway ——"

"That's what I did when I was lowered to the whirlpool below Niagara Falls," Miss Peggy confessed, artlessly.

"Then I take it you won't be for climbing up this outside ladder—even if we put a rope round your waist and give you a friendly haul?"

Queen Tita answered that she was not going to turn acrobat at her time of life; and Miss Peggy pleaded that she had some correspondence to attend to—a sufficient excuse; so the rest of us left these two to their own devices, and set out for the great railway-bridge that here spans the Severn from shore to shore.

Well, it was a way of passing the time while these fateful in-

quiries were being made for us at Bristol; and Jack Duncombe, who knew a little about machinery (as about everything else in this mortal world), had undertaken to be our instructor and guide. And even the most ignorant person could not but view with interest the swinging portion of the bridge—a structure weighing of itself about four hundred tons—that revolves on a massive pivot of stonework. Open, it permits of vessels of any size passing along the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal; shut, it connects itself with the railway crossing the main bridge over the wide river, the junction being so perfect as to be almost imperceptible. Why is it, in looking at the elaborate precautions and safeguards necessary to a construction of this sort, that the mind will morbidly dwell on the possibility of their breaking down? One could not but think of some dark night—a mistake in the signalling—the swing-bridge left open—the long train coming thundering along—and then a confused hurling crash into a black chasm. The iron horse is still a monster in the imagination of many; it has not yet become wholly familiar; it is a devourer of human life more fierce than any dragon.

Then we climbed up an outside iron ladder to the signalling-house at the top of the tower (a performance not to be recommended to nervous persons) and gained a small projecting balcony, and were admitted. Instruction was the order of the day. Did we not understand that no accident *was* possible—seeing that a certain indicator severed the telegraphic communication, so that the persons in charge could not signal a train to come along unless the bridge was closed and locked? Well, machinery is a mystery to most folk; but here, anyway, was a spacious and picturesque view of the wide Severn valley—the rippling channels and yellow sandbeds, the ruddy banks crowned with foliage, the far green hills stretching back into Monmouthshire. And away in the south were wider waters, whither we were bound. From this peak in Darien these shifting shallows seemed safe enough; might not one—as Miss *Peggy had* suggested—make the venture of gliding down with *the tide,* and scrambling along somehow, in the event of no

other aid being offered us? At all events, we were not going to turn back.

Suddenly Colonel Cameron, who had wandered out on to the small platform overlooking this great height, uttered a brief exclamation.

"I say," he called out to us, "isn't that Miss Rosslyn?"

And sure enough it was Miss Rosslyn—away down there—and all by herself—idly strolling along the banks of the canal. Who could mistake the proud and yet leisurely carriage—to say nothing of the glimmer of her golden-brown hair? Nay, of a surety it was Miss Rosslyn; for she looked up as she passed, and waved her hand by way of recognition, and then went on again.

"Look here," he continued quickly, "you get the engineers to open the bridge. I will go down and overtake her, and ask her to wait; it will interest her to see this great thing moving."

"What?" one said to him. "Open the Severn railway bridge to please that brat of an American? Supposing a train were to come along?"

"Why, you don't understand what they've just been telling you!" he exclaimed. "A train *can't* come along. When the bridge opens the telegraphic communication ceases. Besides, there's no train due You get them to do it; I'm off."

So he departed; and after a while one could see him striding rapidly along the banks of the canal, where he soon overtook Miss Rosslyn. Nor did he seem to have much difficulty in persuading her; she turned at once; in a short time these two were right down below us, and looking up.

And certainly it was a curious thing to see this long section of a railway separate itself from the rest of the line, and begin slowly to revolve on its pivot of masonry, until at length, when it became motionless, it was at right angles with the main bridge, and parallel with the canal. Then again it began to move and slowly swung back into its former place, the great iron wedges lifting it on to the stone piers and making the junction complete. It was a pretty toy to put in motion for the amusement of an American Miss; and we hoped she was properly grateful.

But when we descended from these aerial heights, we found that it was not the opening of the Severn railway-bridge that Miss Peggy had in her mind; she was the bearer of a message.

"I thought I'd come along and tell you," she said, "Murdoch was over at the general dealer's shop; and they said they had got an answer to their telegram. They can't let you have the steam-launch; it's hired till the end of next week."

"You seem to consider that rather an amusing piece of news!"

"Yes," she said, simply; "for now we'll have to do something desperate."

"Perhaps you would kindly tell us what?"

But here Sir Ewen Cameron interferes.

"Well," he says, "I wouldn't be beaten—I would take that boat down by water somehow. Sending her by road would be ignominious. Why, I'd rather get a gang of men and haul her along as we used to haul the boats on the Upper Nile. I see by the map there is a sea-wall or a sea-bank nearly all the way down to Bristol. Or why don't you try to row her?—you could put a rowlock on each gunwale astern, and one on each gunwale forward ——"

"We should have a high old rowlocking time of it," says Duncombe, with insolent irrelevance.

"Or why don't you get a raft made, and float it down, as we do on our rivers?" puts in the American person. "Then the boat couldn't get hurt."

"Or why don't you put her on the deck of an outward-bound ship," suggests our facetious young man, "and drop her overboard when you get near the mouth of the Avon?"

"Oh, yes; you've plenty of mighty fine contrivances this afternoon," one says to the ribald crew. "Don't you think we'd better get a couple of balloons, stem and stern, and take her down by air?"

"As you are a Scotchman, you should say Doon by Ayr," Mr. Duncombe is good enough to observe: was there ever such a clever, merry, vivacious dog? But a rope's end would have made that dog skip.

"Well, come away, Miss Peggy," one says to the young lady—

who does *not* seem as disappointed as one could have wished. "We'll go back to the boat and get to know what Columbus thinks of this predicament. When the heavy troubles of life fall on you it isn't clowns and pantaloons you want to consult."

"I foresee," she placidly remarks, as we set out together, "that something wild is going to happen now. You can't send the boat down by road, as Colonel Cameron says it would be too ignominious. So she must go by water; and there's no visible means; therefore something frantic and awful is about to happen. But mind, we are all to keep together."

"Certainly."

"There's to be no landau."

"Perish the landau!"

"Well," she says, with great equanimity, "this is what I like: this is going to be charming." And that, at least, was so far satisfactory. It argued a cheerful frame of mind that she should look forward so confidently to the absolutely unknown.

And yet she proved to be a bit of a prophetess; for it turned out that we were to make a wild attempt to get down by water, after all; and there was to be no division of the party. Hardly had we got back to the Nameless Barge when our excellent friend the Harbour-Master appeared, to whom we disclosed our grievous straits; and then he informed us he had heard of a pilot-boat that was to leave early next morning for Lundy Island. Seeing that a steam-launch of any kind was not procurable, why not induce these pilots, for a consideration, to tow us down? Had we an anchor and chain?—yes, we had. Then, at some convenient point off the mouth of the Avon, the pilots would cast us loose; we could anchor there, and take our chance of some rowing-boat or sailing-boat coming out to guide us into the river and up to Bristol. It must be confessed that there was an element of vagueness about the proposition; but by this time we were grown desperate. Besides, was not Miss Peggy rather looking forward to something strange, uncertain, and even fearful? So, upon consideration, we asked where the pilots were to be found; and the Harbour-Master was then good enough to say that, if the ladies were

inclined for a bit of a country walk on this pleasant afternoon, he would himself show us the way to the little village—a few miles inland—where we should most probably find one or other of them. So we accepted this good-natured offer; and all of us set forth.

What the name of that village was is now immaterial; but at all events the road thither took us through a most charming stretch of landscape—all glowing in the golden light of the afternoon. Very English-looking this bit of country was: the small, irregular fields; the luxuriant hedges and wide ditches; the short, sturdy, wide-spreading oaks; the lush grass in the meadows; and then here or there a small straggling hamlet, the picturesque cottages half-hidden among laburnum and lilac trees, now hanging in blossom of yellow, and purple, and white. Nor was there much of the monotony of a highway; our guide seemed well acquainted with the short cuts; and we skirted woods, or got over stiles, or followed smooth-worn pathways in blind obedience to his lead—glad of the sweet air and the golden light and the quiet country sounds. At first the party had moved forward in an amorphous and changeable fashion; but gradually we had dropped into two and two; Jack Duncombe and our amiable guide leading the way; and Colonel Cameron—with much coolness—taking possession of Peggy. Queen Tita was regarding these two—who were somewhat ahead—when she said, rather wistfully:

"I can imagine Peggy looking very well on the platform at a Highland gathering. Just think of it—her tall figure—I think she would hold her own in appearance—I can fancy her giving away the prizes—Peggy would look very well, wouldn't she?"

"And that is what things are making for, is it?" one asks; for clearly, in this mental picture of hers, the person who is giving away the prizes is Lady Cameron of Inverfask House.

"I don't know," she says, almost sadly. "It seems so. I am sure I am innocent in the matter—innocent of any intention, at least. But I know what they will say of us over there ——"

"Has it ever occurred to your small mind that it may not

much matter what they say of us over there, or over here, or over anywhere else?"

"How will they understand," she continues, absently, "that their daughter may be Lady Cameron of Inverfask and yet have to be economical in her housekeeping? And I suppose it is only dollars they care for—that is the aim and end of life—I mean among the set that her people belong to. Oh, I don't quarrel with them for wishing her to marry well; but it's little they know what she is if they think that luxury or position or display is at all a necessity for her. Peggy is a little finer than *that*. Well, there's one thing they will not be able to say—I mean, if this thing should happen—and that is, that he married *her* for money."

"Why, you talk about them as if they were a pair of indigent paupers! If Cameron has to economise, it is chiefly with a view to getting the debts cleared off his estate—a most proper pride; and you may depend on it that Peggy would understand the situation clearly enough. And do you think she is likely to pay much heed to what anyone may expect of her? She seems capable of judging for herself—at least, what is quite certain is that she will judge for herself. You'd much better take it the other way, and consider that she will not be be so very badly off, after all. If she won't have a house in Mayfair, and be able to give a series of balls all through the London season, at least she'll have her own piper to march up and down outside the dining-room window at Inverfask, playing 'Lochiel's away to France,' or 'The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar'. If she won't be over-burdened with diamonds, she'll have plenty of poor folk on her hands, who will look up to her as a kind of goddess. Dollars? No; she won't have millions of dollars, but she'll have one of the gentle Camerons for her husband; and she will belong to a great historical family; and she will be the mistress of an old historical house; and her position altogether will be one not wholly to be despised. If marriage is to be a bargain, she won't get so much the worst of it. What does she bring?—a pretty face and a great deal of impertinence ——"

"Oh, don't say that about my Peggy!" she says, piteously (though she says it often enough herself). "Just look at her now—did you ever see anything more lovely than her hair, where it catches the warm light? And the way she walks—it isn't grace so much, as life, and ease, and perfect health that it suggests—she never seems to be conscious of a single movement—she is all eagerness, and interest, and delight—I think I feel a little happier every time I look at her."

"So she is to make her first appearance on any platform in order to give away prizes at a Highland gathering—is that it? Well, yes; I daresay her appearance won't be against her. And she is a sharp young woman—I should imagine she wouldn't be long in finding out how to make herself popular among these people in the North. I shouldn't wonder, when Hector Maclean, and Donald Roy, and Alister MacAlister, and all the rest of them, came forward for their prizes, I should not wonder if her leddyship had a word or two of Gaelic for them, to send them away proud and pleased. She has made a poor helpless object of Murdoch; and Captain Columbus is just daft to do her any small service."

"But, supposing they *don't* go to Inverfask," she says. "And supposing he were ordered out to India, or China, or some such place?"

"Then Peggy would become a grass-widow; and you could ask her to come and live with us: that would be very nice."

"Yes—for you," she says.

"But not for you?"

"Oh, well, I can bear with Peggy," she has to confess, "so long as there are no men about to bother her. But I do hope all this is a false alarm. I can hardly believe it possible—of Peggy, of all people in the world! And there is Mr. Duncombe; he seems quite to accede; he doesn't try to win any of her attention ——"

"What? He makes bad jokes by the dozen, and tells stories of theatres, and curses critics, and tunes her banjo: what more can you want?"

"But she pays no heed to him!" this small creature pro-

tests. "If I were a young man, I should not like to be snuffed out like that. She used to be glad enough to have him to go on with. But now—oh, dear, no!—she would rather hear about the ball at the Inverness Meeting—and the number of salmon Lord Lovat took out of the Beauly in a single week—and all that kind of thing ——"

This conversation came abruptly to an end; for we were now arrived at the little hamlet, whatever its name was; and as our guide stopped at a certain cottage the ranks of this straggling party closed up. Soon we were in negotiation with a tall, modest-mannered, slim young man whom we understood to be part owner of the pilot-boat; terms were easily arranged, and we undertook to be ready to start between three and four on the following morning, so as to catch the turn of the tide. Thereafter there was another leisurely walk homeward—for we had come to consider the boat a kind of home by this time—through the still golden evening; but it was not Sir Ewen Cameron who was Miss Peggy's companion on the return journey; it was his hostess with whom he now walked; what their talk was about one could not say.

Poor little Mrs. Threepenny-bit!—it seemed to be some kind of consolation to her in her distress that, if her fears proved to be true, Peggy would look rather well in her new position. That night (there was no sitting up late, in view of our early start on the morrow), if the small imaginative person dreamed dreams, it is as likely as not that they were all about a great crowd of spectators assembled in some wide meadow in the far northern Highlands; in the open space kilted competitors putting the stone, tossing the caber, playing the pipes, and what not; subsequently, the various winners coming forward to the platform, cap in hand, to receive their prizes from a tall young lady, somewhat benign of aspect, and with honestly smiling eyes, who possibly may have a friendly word for each of them. And this tall young lady (perhaps, just by way of loyalty to her clan, wearing a bit of ribbon of the Cameron tartan round her throat) is—as any of those people around would tell you—no other than her leddyship of Inverfask.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Where lies the land to which yon Ship must go?
Festively she puts forth in trim array;
As vigorous as a lark at break of day;
Is she for tropic sun or polar snow?
What boots the inquiry?—Neither friend nor foe
She cares for; let her travel where she may,
She finds familiar names—a beaten way
Ever before her, and a wind to blow.
Yet still I ask, what haven is her mark?
And, almost as it was when ships were rare
(From time to time, like pilgrims, here and there
Crossing the waters), doubt, and something dark,
Of the old sea some reverential fear,
Is with me at thy farewell, joyous bark!"

At half-past two, on this perfectly calm morning, there are a few stars still visible in the western skies—faint-trembling points of silver in the deep-hued violet vault; but away in the east there is a pale, mysterious light that appears to tell of the coming dawn; whilst just over a serrated ridge of jet-black trees hangs the thin sickle of the moon, orange-hued, and sending down on the smooth surface of the water a long line of gold, broken here or there by some accidental ripple. The birds are already singing in the strange twilight; and their shrill carolling seems to belong to some other and distant sphere; for the great world around us lies dark and dumb and dead. When Murdoch comes out, he speaks in undertones (it had been arranged we were to try to get the boat along to the basin without awakening any of the people on board), and when Columbus appears at the water-side, he looks like a ghost approaching through the transparent, bewildering, phantasmal gloom.

Then in the prevailing silence we stealthily release the Nameless Barge from her moorings; and with brief paddlings of oars and poles get her over to the other side, where the tow-

path is. There Murdoch and Columbus go ashore taking with them the end of the line attached to the bow; and forthwith we are noiselessly gliding along through the smooth waters of the canal, towards the great gates that are to let us forth into the Severn.

Presently the door opposite the steersman is opened with an exceeding quietness; the figure of a tall young lady becomes visible, clad in a long dressing-gown, and with some soft white thing flung around her head and neck and shoulders; then as carefully and gently the door is shut again.

"I haven't wakened anyone," she says, in an apologetic whisper.

"You'd much better go back to bed; you can't have had more than three hours' sleep."

"I haven't had any," she says. "I was too excited. I was lying awake, watching the stars; and then I thought I felt the boat moving; and I guessed you had begun. I'm not in your way, am I?"

"Certainly not; but it will be a tedious business getting through the locks."

"Oh! but it is ever so much nicer to be out here. And what a strangely beautiful morning it is!" she says, looking all around her.

Indeed she is almost justified in calling it morning now; for those trees close by are no longer quite black—some shadowy suggestion of green is traceable on the long shelving branches; the stars in the west have disappeared, and the skies there have grown from a deep violet to a pale, ethereal lilac; while in the eastern heavens the faint, wan glow has become radiant and clear: the herald of the new day, on some far hill-top, is blowing his silver bugle to awaken the sleeping valleys. She regards all this, for some time, in silence. Then one hears her repeat—almost to herself—the beginning of the old ballad:

> "Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,
> He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day's dawing,"

though what fancy she has in her mind it is hard to say. She turns from her musings:

"Have you many mornings like this in those wonderful places in the North?" she asks, rather wistfully.

"You will find still stranger things—seasons in which there is no night at all. You can sit on deck and read till midnight, if you like; only it is much nicer not to read; but to have some amiable young creature play and sing ballads for you; or you can walk up and down and listen to the sea-birds. No night at all; the sunset merely glides into the sunrise; and you have a new day around you before you know where you are."

"But," she says, "when you have been in such beautiful places, don't you feel it to be just dreadful to come back and live in a town?"

"Not at all. It is the contrast that tells. Perhaps, if you lived there always, you might become too familiar with it; you might lose the fine touch of things that wonder gives you. The first wild primrose you come upon in the spring has an extraordinary fascination and interest; but if there were spring and summer all the year round—none of the deadness of winter—where would be the surprise and delight?"

"Well," she says, after a little while—and her eyes are fixed on that light in the east, that is momentarily becoming more clear and silvery and wonderful, "there are things that could never grow familiar. Daybreak is one. There is always mystery about it. It is like coming to life again, after death. You have been away, you don't know where; and you come back to the world; and when you find it as it is now—belonging almost to yourself, all the other people as good as out of it—it is very strange. No; I'm not afraid of becoming too familiar with beautiful things. Besides, the halcyon times you talk about don't last for ever. You have the stormy weather coming on; rain and gales; then you are shut up a prisoner in the house; and when you can go out again—when the sunlight and splendid weather come again—you have all the delight of novelty and surprise, just as much as if you had gone to live in some grimy old town."

She seemed inclined to continue talking, in this hushed way, about those northern scenes that had aroused her

curiosity; but we were now arrived at the lock-gates, and business had to be attended to. All that one could hear of Miss Peggy was an occasional snatch of the ballad that seemed to be running through her head:

> "There rode wi' fierce Inveray thirty and three;
> And nane wi' the Gordons save his brother and he;
> Twa gallanter Gordons did never sword draw,
> But against three-and-thirty, wae's me! what were twa?"

At length we got down to the great basin, where all manner of craft were lying ready to sail with the turn of the tide, and there modestly took up our position by the side of some of the smaller vessels. There was as yet no symptom of life anywhere; but the objects round about us were now clearly defined; and colours had become visible—the red of the steep, high bank, the warm yellow-green of the hanging foliage, and the resplendent saffron of the eastern skies, against which the tall interposing masts were of intensest black.

Suddenly there was a harsh croak overhead, and a whirr as if a hundred sky-rockets had simultaneously hurtled through the air.

"What's that?" Miss Peggy exclaimed—startled out of the low tones in which she had been talking.

"Look, Mem, look!" said Murdoch, who was standing on the quay. "It's a string of wild geese—look!" And away the great birds went swinging over to the western seas.

But towards four o'clock it began to be apparent that there was some human life on board these various craft. Here and there a thin blue line of smoke would rise from the stove-pipe into the motionless air; here and there an ancient mariner would appear on deck, rubbing his eyes, and looking all round the heavens for a sign. Soon, indeed, there was plenty of animation. Gradually the crews tumbled up and began to hoist sail—a picturesque occupation in this early morning glow; and presently the ringing music of the top-sail halyards told us they were looking forward to a quiet slipping down the stream. Bustle and activity prevailed everywhere; men on deck calling to men on shore; hawsers being passed over our heads; on the smaller craft long sweeps being got ready. In

the midst of this general uproar it is hardly to be wondered at that the rest of the people on board the Nameless Barge should speedily make their appearance.

"Here's a pretty hullaballoo!" says Queen Tita, looking all round her at the picturesque clusters of boats, with their tall spars and ruddy sails. "Well, we are going to have sufficient company. If anything goes wrong, there will be plenty of people ready to pick us up."

"Don't be too sure of that," one says to her. "When once we get started, you'll soon find out how a smart-sailing pilot-boat will draw away from these lumbering craft. That is, if we get any wind at all. At present there isn't a breath. Now, will anyone explain how we are to be towed down to Bristol in a dead calm?"

"And you—you American girl," she says, turning to Miss Peggy, "what have you been about? When did you steal out of that cabin?"

"About half-past two, I believe," answers Miss Rosslyn, with an air of calm superiority. "*I* have seen it all from the beginning."

"I don't know how it is," continues Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "but you two are always up first on board this boat. What is it? A wakeful conscience?"

"It is not," answers Miss Peggy, promptly. "It is simply the necessity of looking after this valuable craft. Of course, if you choose to lie in your berth till all hours of the day, you must have somebody to manage things for you. And there's no sloth about me. I am always willing to sacrifice myself for the general good."

"Yes; but I want to know what your share was?—what did you manage?" says the other.

"I kept my weather-eye open," Miss Peggy answers, enigmatically.

"No doubt you did!—I'll be bound you did! And so *his* is what you call all hours of the day, is it, when it is hardly four o'clock? I know this, that I wish Murdoch could get us a cup of tea."

"You'll have to leave Murdoch alone," one says to her. "There are all these vessels beginning to slip out; and Murdoch will be wanted at the bow, until we get attached to the pilot-boat. Indeed, he'd better stop there all the way down; so there will be little breakfast for you for some hours to come. Why don't you go inside and bring out some soda-water and biscuits?"

"Well," she says, with much good-nature, "people who make long voyages into distant lands have to put up with many things. But soda-water and biscuits—it's a gruesome breakfast!"

"I'm going to hunt out some beer, if I may," said Jack Duncombe, forthwith.

"I think," said Colonel Cameron, "if you will let me advise, that an egg beaten up in a glass of sherry would be a good deal wholesomer for you ladies at this time of the morning—and if you are not going to have breakfast for some hours ——"

But here Miss Peggy interposed.

"An egg—and sherry?" she said. "Why shouldn't we have egg-nog at once? Let's all have some egg-nog—and you may drink to the Fourth of July or not just as you please. And do you think I do not know how to make it? Oh, but I do. And I know that Murdoch has all the materials; and I know where he keeps them; so come along and get out the glasses."

Accordingly these greedy people crowded into Murdoch's pantry, where one could hear them hauling things about, with a great deal of unseemly jesting. At the same time, when the Transatlantic beverage was at length produced, one could not but confess that it was extremely grateful and comforting at this early hour of the morning; and the Daughter of the Republic received our general thanks. Not that she came back at this moment. Oh, no; nor for some time thereafter. When she did return to us, we could perceive that she had seized the occasion to get rid of her haphazard costume (which was all very well in the mysterious light preceding the dawn), and now wore her suit of blue serge. She had done up her hair, too, and was altogether looking very smart and fine and neat.

Meanwhile we had attached ourselves to the pilot-boat, and were now lying out in the open—in the midst of a dead calm

—and with a scene of singular beauty all around us. Here was no longer any river with twisting channels and bare sand-banks, but a vast lakelike expanse of yellow water, quite smooth save for the rippling of the tide; and that rippling declared itself in a series of sharp flashes of turquoise blue, the colour of the overhead sky. On this pale golden plain the various craft —already widely separated—lay with their grey or brown or russet sails idly swaying or entirely motionless; the various tints and hues warmed into loveliness by the light streaming over from the gates of the morn. For by this time the sun was actually risen; and his rays shot across the great Severn valley, glorifying all the wide plain of waters, and shining along the wood-crowned, low-lying, green hills in the west.

Of course we regarded with some little curiosity our friends in the boat to which we were attached; and found them to be far away indeed from the old-fashioned type of pilot. They were quite elegant young men, and smartly dressed; in fact, if it hadn't been that they showed something of a seafaring complexion, and that one or two of them were plainly solacing themselves with the chewing of tobacco, they might have been taken for a party of city clerks setting forth for a day's pleasure-sailing. Though very little sailing there was for anybody. For a little while there was a light puff of wind coming over from the east—the merest cat's-paw, just sufficient to fill the sails; but presently that died away; we were in a dead calm again; and so they on board the pilot-boat took to the sweeps, and began to work at these. We crept along in a kind of way, but very slowly—opposite the green hills and farms of Lydney and its neighbourhood.

"And where is all the danger that was talked about?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as bold as a very lion (perhaps the egg-nog had something to do with her fearlessness).

"Where, indeed!" said the steersman.

"Besides, we are in open daylight," she continued. "The darkness was the hateful thing about those tunnels. Now, if anything happens, we shall see what it is; and those young men could stop in a moment and help us. Why, this seems to be about the quietest and safest part of the whole trip!"

Oh, yes, it was all very pleasant—the sweet air of the morning, the smooth-lapping water, the sun shining along the ruddy banks and the green woods and fields, and our slow floating down with the tide. One was almost for withdrawing Murdoch from his post forward and sending him to get breakfast ready, but that now and again one's nostrils seemed to perceive some faint indication of a change of wind—or rather of a coming wind—while as yet there was nothing to stir the sails. And very shortly thereafter, indeed, the sails did stir—and quietly fell over and filled; then the sweeps were taken in; and presently we found ourselves being towed through these yellow waters in quite a joyous fashion. Even with this lumbering weight behind her, the pilot-boat gradually drew away from all her rivals; the young men who looked like clerks had no trouble at all in not only keeping the lead but increasing it—beating against the ever-freshening south-westerly breeze with a shiftiness and judgment that were very pleasant to watch from this old tub of ours. Of course we had nothing to do but follow accurately in their wake, and avoid the temptation of making little short cuts when they put about; and as the wind was getting brisker and brisker—and blowing up against the current—it was quite a new and delightful experience to chase this flyer through the now rising sea.

And now Miss Peggy separates herself from these associates of hers in the stern-sheets—steps on to the steering-thwart—catches hold of the iron rod by both hands and places her chin on these as if she was bent merely on gazing away over the waste of waters we are leaving behind, and towards the distant shores.

"I say," she observes, in a remarkably low voice, "isn't this what Murdoch calls a 'sous' wind?"

"South-westerly, I should say."

She smiles a little (the others cannot see her face).

"That was the wind those men at the docks spoke of," she remarks.

"What then?"

"I was thinking of the five hundred pounds," she says, demurely.

"Five hundred fiddlesticks! She is walking the water like a thing of life. Don't you feel how beautifully she goes?"

"Yes, but is she going to do it any more?" she asks.

"Do what?"

"Why, jump about like this."

"It isn't jumping about. I tell you it's the minuet in 'Ariadne' she's doing."

"Is the water going to be any rougher?"

"If this wind keeps up it certainly will be."

"Oh, my gracious!" she says, in accents of dismay, and one understands at once what she is afraid of.

"Now listen to words of wisdom: if you want to induce sea-sickness, you're doing your best at present—standing up here in that spread-eagle fashion. But if you wish to guard against it—I mean, if the water should get really rough further down—you just ask Colonel Cameron or Mr. Duncombe to go into the saloon and get out a tin of cold tongue and some biscuits and a bottle of champagne. Begin with a bit of biscuit. Then take a sip of champagne. Then some cold tongue and biscuit. Then some more champagne. Keep on as long as you can at the cold tongue and champagne; and then go and get a footstool, and cuddle yourself up in that corner there, and sit perfectly still: do you understand?"

"But I should feel just horrid asking for those things for myself," she protests. "Will your wife join me, do you think?"

"Join you in eating some cold tongue and biscuit? My dear young friend, she would eat you, or the boat, or anybody, or anything, rather than run the risk of being sea-sick."

"Well, I'm not going to give in just yet, at any rate," she says; and she maintains her position on the steering-thwart, only she turns round now to face the pleasant breeze.

We were getting plenty of sailing for our money, but making little progress, owing to the perpetual tacking. Jack Duncombe and the Colonel were between them trying to make out by the chart the whereabouts of Sheperdine Sands and Norwood Rocks and Whinstone Rocks; but the high tide rendered this difficult, and we could only guess at the distance we had come. At all

events we had left the other vessels a long way behind; we could see them still sawing and sawing across that yellow plain, in the teeth of the still freshening wind.

But when, in course of time, we got still further down, we could better make out our position. There, unmistakably, was the mouth of the Wye, with the long spit running out, and ending in a conspicuous watch-house. Clearly we were getting on. And so far the Nameless Barge had behaved herself admirably; if our young friends in the pilot-boat may have been tempted to smile when they saw her bobbing up and down in their wake—like a fat old donkey being dragged along by a thoroughbred—they were polite enough to conceal their merriment. We never pretended that good looks were our strong point. What we wanted was to get down to Bristol; and we rather congratulated ourselves on having got so far in safety. If there yet lay ahead of us a certain channel or series of channels called "The Shoots," of which the Sharpness people had spoken in somewhat solemn tones —— But who was afraid? Even Mrs. Threepenny-bit professed rather to like this sawing and sawing across; and nobody was so ill-natured as to draw attention to the fact that all the southern horizon was now grown dark, as if there was a stiffish bit of a storm brewing down there.

But what the Sharpness people had been warning us about we were by-and-by to discover. "The Shoots," as they are called, are formed by the sudden contraction of the Severn estuary between Northwich and Portskewet (at New Passage, that is), and consist of a series of races and whirlpools not unlike those in the neighbourhood of Corrievreckan—over by the Corra Islands and the Dorus Môr. When we found these currents strong enough to grip the pilot-boat by the bows and yaw her about, it is to be imagined that our poor old Noah's Ark—lumbering up in the rear—had anything but a "daisy time" of it. Moreover, the water became more and more lumpy—what with the swirling currents themselves, and the breeze blowing against the tide; the Nameless Barge began to forsake her heavy gambollings for all kinds of mystical and unexpected gyrations; and again and again ominous noises told of

catastrophes within. With that, of course, no one cared to concern himself; the saloon and cabins and pantry might mix themselves up, if they chose; they might make of the whole inside of the ship an elongated dice-box: it was what was happening out here that claimed our attention. And so we fought our way—with such rolling, and pitching, and springing, and curvetting as is quite indescribable—down through the Shoots; until, as the morning went by, we gained what looked liked a very good imitation of the open sea, where the pilot-boat began to lengthen out her tacks.

It was now blowing hard, and looking very dirty in the south; and one of us, at least, began to wish that the two women could be transferred to the other boat The pilots themselves (who had lowered their topsail some time ago) no longer seemed to regard this performance as a joke; they kept an eye on our unwieldy craft, as she plunged through the heavily-running sea. Indeed, it was almost ludicrous to watch this misshapen thing dipping her nose in the water, and springing forward again, and dashing the foam from her bows just as if she were a real yacht; and the only question was how long she was likely to keep up the pretence by remaining afloat.

Presently a new and startling discovery was made. As there was no calculating what time we should get to Bristol, with this head-wind driving against us, the steersman desired Jack Duncombe to go inside and bring forth a handful of biscuits; and the young man cheerfully obeyed. The next instant he came out again—without any biscuits.

"I say," he exclaimed, with a curious expression of face, "this blessed boat is full of water!"

In a moment—from the look of the women—he perceived the mistake he had made.

"Oh, no; not that," he protested, "but a little water has come in, and it's slopping all about the floor of the saloon. Here, you'd better let me take the tiller for a minute, and you can go and look for yourself."

Of course we all of us instantly made for the door of the saloon; and there a most unpleasant spectacle met our eyes;

for if there was not as yet much water visible, it was washing from side to side as the vessel lurched; and, of course, no one could tell at what rate the leakage was coming in.

"Is she going to sink?" said Miss Peggy, rather breathlessly: it was Sir Ewen Cameron she addressed.

"I won't stay another moment in this boat," Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaimed "You must call to the pilots—tell them to stop and take us on board ——"

"Oh, be quiet!" one had to say to her. "There is nothing of a leakage—it only means that there's nowhere for the water to go to. Don't you understand that all the space below the flooring was filled up with that old iron so as to let her get underneath the bridges?—and this water is merely coming in at some of the dried seams—or, perhaps, at the bull's-eyes——"

"And how fast is it coming in?" she asked.

"How can anybody tell? We'll have to wait and watch. Or rather, Columbus must come inside and watch; and if the water should begin to rise in any quantity, then we may have to get on board the pilot-boat; that's all. It isn't doing any harm—it's only washing the floor ——"

Here a violent pitch of the boat flung us all together; and then we could see through the forward window her bows shaking off a great mass of foam.

"Do you see that now? She isn't used to dipping her nose like that; and, of course, there must be sun-dried seams on the bit of deck up there. Or, it may be, those bull's-eyes have got a little loose ——"

Well, it has to be conceded to Colonel Cameron that he was the only one who cared to wet his ankles in order to make an examination. He boldly splashed through the lurching water, and got to the further end of the saloon, and, stooping down, strove to reach with his long arm the circular pieces of glass set in the bows of the boat. But neither there nor anywhere else could we find out the source of the leakage; and when Captain Columbus was summoned from his post and shown the state of affairs it was generally agreed that the water must be coming in through defective seams, and that, if it did

not pour in any faster than it seemed to be doing at present, we should manage to get to our anchorage in safety. Nevertheless, Columbus was directed to remain in the saloon, and furnished with a bucket and a bailing-can, to amuse himself withal.

But now these long tacks were telling; and we hoped that we should ere long be getting under shelter of a certain dark spur of land running out there in the south. And none too soon either. We had not bargained for this squally weather when we started in the morning, and we knew well enough that this top-heavy boat was not at all fitted for the open sea. Of course we were glad that she was doing so well; and the reports from the saloon informed us that the water was not rapidly increasing; but we were perfectly aware that, if a heavier wave than usual should happen to strike her broadside on, she was just as likely as not to "turn turtle". For one thing we kept all the doors and windows of the house-part rigorously closed, so that no sudden gust could get hold of her that way; the other alternative—to open them all and let the wind blow freely through—did not recommend itself.

So our gallant convoy continued to cut her way through those swift-running seas like a racer; and we laboriously plunged, and rolled, and struggled after. It must be said for the women that they were very brave over it; after that first fright about the water in the saloon, they had hardly a word to say; they merely looked on in silence—sitting close to each other. And now that long dark spur of land—Portishead Point, was it called?—was drawing sensibly nearer. The shipping that was gradually becoming visible no doubt marked the whereabouts of the King, or King's, Road; and that, we knew, was just off the mouth of the Avon. Then the sea grew a little calmer. Captain Columbus was provided with a huge sponge to help him in his bailing. We could hear Murdoch at the bow calling to his brother mariners ahead of him—asking for instructions, most probably. And at length and at last the connecting hawser was shipped, and we parted company; the pilots put out a small boat, and our tall, modest-eyed young friend came on board to be paid; and when we had settled accounts, and when he had shaken hands with each one of us

(there is somehow always a touch of the pathetic in a sailor's farewell), we found ourselves at anchor in a comparatively smooth sheet of yellow water, and near to a dutch-looking line of coast, the topmasts of vessels, or here and there a little glimmer of distant landscape, appearing above steep banks of mud.

"Now, Miss Peggy, you and I expect to be waited upon by the whole of this ship's crew and passengers. We have been on duty since half-past two, and now it is ten. If that isn't working for one's breakfast, what is?"

"I'm sure I'm hungry enough," said Miss Peggy, sadly; and Queen Tita was so touched with compassion that she herself began to get the table ready, while Murdoch was in the pantry, busy with ham and eggs and tea.

Now, we had just finished breakfast, and had gone out again to have a look at our surroundings, when we were approached by a wherry containing three men, who offered, for a consideration, to tow us up to Bristol. Truth compels the admission that these three sailors of Bristol city were about the most villainous-looking set of scoundrels one had ever clapped eyes on; and experience proved that they were capable of acting up to their looks. But still, getting to Bristol was the main thing; we agreed to their exorbitant terms, gave them a line, and away they went, we following.

Soon we had entered the river Avon, which is probably rather a pretty river at full tide, but was now, at low water, showing long mud-banks that were far from attractive. As we got further inland, however, we passed through beautiful woods, now almost in full summer foliage; and, whatever had become of the storm we had seen gathering in the south, there were clear blue skies overhead, and a warm sunlight filling the river valley. The three pirates, we observed, drank hard all the way, having replenished their huge keg at a place called Pill. It was none of our business, of course; we were idly speculating as to which would probably murder which before nightfall; and we came to the conclusion that it did not greatly matter—so long as there was a reasonable likelihood that one or other of them would get his notice to quit.

The first trick they played us was to stop at a stone slip not far from Clifton Suspension Bridge, intimating that they had ful

filled their contract, and wanted to be paid. Unthinkingly we gave them the money, only to find out that there was no tow-path here, and that we were stuck fast. Then Guzzling Jack and Gorging Jimmy for a further consideration offered to pull us on another stage—into Bristol city proper; and to that we, being helpless, agreed. At the second stoppage we were somewhat cheered by the sight of the Horse-Marine and his four-footed companion, who were awaiting us. Moreover, there was here a tow-path—at least, there was the common street; but it was so far away from the river-edge that there was some difficulty in getting the boat along; whereupon the pirates, observing our quandary, again offered us their help, and volunteered to pull us into the Floating Harbour—for yet another sovereign. We gazed upon these men in silence, and had no answer for them. Forthwith they became pertinacious. Then we curtly bade them begone; and even told them (the women-folk being within) whither we wished them to go. But then again—when Columbus informed us that he and Murdoch could get the Nameless Barge along to the docks by themselves, and suggested that we might as well go ashore now, and that he would bring our things to the hotel later on—it occurred to us that we were once more dependent on those sailors of Bristol. So we airily and good-naturedly pointed out to them that they might do us the favour of taking us ashore—a few yards distance—in their boat; and this they did; but they claimed a shilling a head for the service, and then were dissatisfied, and sulkily demanded drink. We parted with them more in sorrow than in anger; for the contemplation of such deeps of depravity is painful. And even that, as will hereafter be related, was not our last experience of the three Bristol pirates.

As we were leisurely getting along to our hotel on the College Green, Colonel Cameron hung back a little, allowing Jack Duncombe to go on with the women-folk.

"Look here, my friend," said Inverfask, in something of an undertone, "now it's all over, I suppose you ought to be congratulated on having come down the Severn in a house-boat, and in the face of half-a-gale of wind. Well, you've done it—successfully—for once. But, if I were you, *I wouldn't try it again.*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around,
Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,
And glittering towns, and gilded streams, till all
The stretching landscape into smoke decays!"

NEXT morning is a Sunday—calm and clear and still; a placid sunlight falls on the trees in the College Green, on the pavements, and the closed shop-windows: a soft sound of church bells fills all the tranquil air. And then, when our women-folk, accompanied by Colonel Cameron, have gone away to the Cathedral, a kind of hush falls over this great hotel; the spacious rooms look preternaturally empty; one wonders when Jack Duncombe will have finished with his letter-writing, and be ready to set forth on a hunt for the whereabouts of the Nameless Barge.

Presently he comes along into the hall.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he says, as he lights a cigar at the top of the steps. "Fact is, I had rather an important letter to write. Do you know——?" he asks, naming the editor of a well-known evening paper.

"Not personally."

"I chanced to meet him at dinner the very night before I came down to you. We sat next each other, and got on very well. I found he was an eager trout-fisher—most likely taken to it late in life and anxious to make up for lost time; and that he was going down to Derbyshire this summer; so I thought I couldn't do better than tell him that if he was anywhere near my father's place I would see he had the fishing on our preserved water—for we've never anybody down there in June. That seemed to fetch him a little, I think. Then we talked about journalism; and he had seen one or two small things of mine—in *The Londoner*, and elsewhere; and when I told him I was coming down to you, he said, 'Why, what a chance for you to get a lot of miscellaneous reviewing done. If you like, I will send

you down a parcel of books—for short notices only—and it will be no trouble to you to look through them as you are sailing along. It will help you to pass the time.' You needn't imagine I refused—for a small beginning is better than nothing: and I had to write down where I expected to be in a few days' time; not that I counted too much on it, for I thought it was merely after-dinner good-nature on his part. However, I fancy Derbyshire must have stuck in his mind; for this morning there comes a letter saying the books have been sent off—so, I suppose, I ought to get them the first thing to-morrow."

Here one pauses—as we are passing along these sunlit Bristol streets—to regard him: is there any outward sign of transformation?

"So this is the end of all your rage and contempt and abuse? You've become a critic yourself?"

"Oh, well," he says, with the coolest effrontery, "the critics of books and plays and pictures don't do much harm. They don't, indeed. They're all contradicting each other; and the public see that and judge for themselves. The public are the final judge. No," he continues (and really this Short-noticer is beginning to talk with an air of authority); "the critics who do positive harm are the critics of life—the writers who from day to day and from week to week pour out morbid and distorting and belittling opinions about human nature and human affairs. I suppose, now, the ordinary Englishman never reflects that he spends nearly all his leisure time in the society of journalists. They are his companions—whether he is travelling in a railway carriage or toasting his toes before the dining-room fire. It is their views of things that he unconsciously adopts. When he goes into his club of an afternoon, he nods to this acquaintance or to that, but he seldom stops to consult them about things in general; he passes into the reading-room, and takes up an evening paper, and listens to what it has to say about every subject in the known world. And who is it he is actually listening to?" the young man goes on, as we make our way down and across the bridge, where there are numerous groups of idlers on this quiet Sunday morning.

"Of course, it may chance to be some quite sensible and well-informed person; but as likely as not it is some literary fellow whose nerves have all gone to bits, or whose liver has got all wrong. Or it may be some poor creature of a woman disappointed of a husband, or, worse still, with a husband gone to the bad, whom she has to support. And of course the literary fellow can't take a healthy and wholesome view of anything—a cheap sort of cynicism comes most natural to him, or a still more hopeless pessimism; and the woman is morose and bitter; and so, between them, they present you with a very charming picture of what is going on in the world. We are all of us hypocrites, and worse. Statesmen make a pretence of caring for their country; but we know better: place—salary—that is their aim. Literature, art, and science are cultivated merely for the money they can produce. Married women drink in secret. Married men, when they can afford it, keep a seraglio. Girls are eager to sell themselves in the marriage-market to the highest bidder. Even children only pretend to like Christmas—they see through the sham sentiment, the affected merry-making. And so on—you know the kind of thing. To be disgusted with everything—to believe in nothing—that's the cue. Well, now," he continues, with much cheerful complacency, "in my Utopia I am going to have my journalists trained. They are the modern teachers and preachers; they must be brought up to have a healthy sympathy with all forms of human activity. Cricket and football of great importance. They must ride, and shoot, and skate, and play lawn-tennis. Then they must travel, and learn how people live in other countries; they must talk at least three modern languages; they must visit every part of the British Empire, to see for themselves how so great a structure is maintained——"

"Yes," one says to him, "all that is very excellent. But have you the slightest notion where we are likely to find Captain Columbus?"

"Ah," he says, with some disappointment, "you have no regard for the welfare of your native country."

"I thought it was Utopia you were talking about. And that is a long way away. Whereas this Floating Harbour—here

at hand—is quite enough of a conundrum; and we are bound to find the boat before we go back."

"If the pirates haven't boarded her and run away with her," he says, as we continue our patient trudge along the almost deserted quays.

But after long hunting we at length discovered the Nameless Barge, in a kind of *cul-de-sac*, lying outside some empty coal-boats; and having clambered over these and got on board, we found Murdoch in sole possession, Columbus and the Horse-Marine having gone off to visit the town.

"Well, Murdoch," one naturally inquired, "I suppose you saw nothing more of those rascals yesterday?"

"Indeed yes, Sir," Murdoch answered, with a grin. "They came back to the boat."

"What for?"

"Well, Sir, they said you had telled them they were to come and get a bottle of champagne."

"You did not give it to them, surely?"

"Not me, Sir! I chist telled them they were liars, and to go aweh."

"And then?"

"Well, then, Sir, they threepit* and better threepit; and I said I would not give them a bottle of champagne, or a bottle of anything else; and I wass thinking one o' them wass for coming into the boat, so I took up an oar." Here Murdoch grinned again. "Oh, ay, Sir, they sah I was ready."

"Ready for what? For his coming on board?"

"Chist that, Sir. If he had tried to come on board, I would have splut his skull," said Murdoch, coolly. "And they sah I wass ready for them; and then there wass a good dale of sweering, and they went aweh."

We now inquired of him whether he felt any nervous qualms about being left alone on board in this pirate-infested city; but Murdoch's mind was quite easy on that point. Indeed, we discovered that Columbus and the Horse-Marine were coming back at one o'clock to fetch him away for an exploration of

* *Threepit*=maintained or asserted.

the wonders of Bristol city, the friendly owner of a neighbouring smack having offered to keep an eye on the Nameless Barge during the afternoon. So we left full instructions about our departure on the morrow, and made our way ashore again.

Now as those other people would not be back from the Cathedral till near lunch-time, we set forth on a long ramble to fill in the interval—wandering along the old-fashioned streets, and admiring here and there an ancient gable or latticed window, visiting a church or two (we incontinently broke the tenth commandment in regarding the beautiful old oak pews in St. Mary Redcliffe), and generally finding ourselves being brought up sharply by the twisting and impassable harbour. It was during this aimless perambulation that Jack Duncombe made a confession of far greater importance than his change of views about the function of criticism. What led up to it one does not precisely remember; perhaps it was merely the opportunity; for there were not many chances of talking in confidence on board the Nameless Barge. At all events, it was when we were walking down Redcliffe Hill that he began to say:

"Well, I shall be glad when we get away from these towns into the quiet, pastoral districts again. Living on board is ever so much better fun than putting up at a hotel. It used to be so delightful to have merely to choose out a meadow and a few willow-stumps, and pass the night where you pleased. I am looking forward to the Kennet and Avon; and I don't mind telling you that I hope to enjoy this last part of the trip a great deal more than any that came before ——"

"Naturally. The consciousness of having attained to the dignity of being a reviewer ——"

"Oh, no; not that," he says, simply. "But, of course, that will be a pleasant occupation. And won't I astonish my editor-friend by my thoroughness! There's no reason why short notices shouldn't be well done—not the least; and I have no cause for scamping; I have plenty of time. Oh, I'll show him something. But it isn't that at all that promises to make the last part of this trip rather gay for me. No. The

truth is, when I had to leave you at Warwick, I was in a little bit of a scrape ——"

"We guessed as much."

"And it threatened to become a rather serious scrape. I suppose I may tell you the story, now that it's all over. You see, there is a young lady ——"

"Of course."

"Yes, there generally is; but this one is a ward in Chancery," he remarks, calmly.

"What?"

"A ward in Chancery—that is where the trouble comes in. Her mother is a waspish old vinegar-cruet—tremendously proud of her ancestry—the family have been settled in Wilts since the time of Edward III.—at least so they say—and of course she hates me like poison. I can fancy the old cat crying 'Imagine Maud marrying the son of a man who hasn't even a coat of arms on his carriage!' And I suppose it was she who set the guardians against me; though what I had done I don't know—except that the paragraph devoted to us in the 'County Families of the United Kingdom' is uncommonly short. Well, you know, that talk about Edward III. is ridiculous now-a-days," continues this garrulous and discursive young man. "I call it ridiculous. If you can paint a picture, or compose a piece of music, or write a successful book, that is something to show for yourself. That is what you can do. But merely because some old robber and thief got hold of a lump of land in the fourteenth century, and because your family have stuck to it like limpets ever since—to be proud of *that!* ——"

"But about the guardians?" one says to him.

"Oh, they declared that the young lady should remain perfectly free and unbiassed until she came of age: when a girl reaches twenty-one, she suddenly becomes wise—I suppose that's the theory. Well, neither of us seemed to see the fun of that arrangement; and then the guardians proceeded to extremities; yes, they did their little best—or shabbiest, as one might say; they applied to the Vice-Chancellor, and he issued an order directing that all communication should cease be-

tween her and me. It seemed hard—and it was hard, for a while. Then one naturally began to think of how to mitigate these cruel circumstances."

"That means, I suppose, that you communicated with her all the same?"

"They pretended to think so," observes the young man, very slowly. "You see, it is very difficult to define what communications are—very difficult; and you can't expect lawyers to have large and liberal views. In fact, the Court of Chancery have no sense of humour whatever. If they think you're playing tricks, they only grow morose. Well, I tell you, when I left you at Warwick, I was in a devil of a fix and no mistake; I had visions of a scene in court, the Vice-Chancellor whisking thunder and lightning all about my head, and finally sending me off to Holloway prison to purge my contempt. And the trouble I had to explain and apologise and give assurances by the yard—I assure you it required a great deal of tact to appear very penitential and yet maintain that there was nothing for you to be penitential about."

"So you are engaged to be married, are you?" one says to him (involuntarily recalling certain of Queen Tita's wistful dreams and fancies).

"We've been engaged these two years," he makes answer, "but it has been kept very quiet, owing to that absurd opposition. However, that will soon be over. Miss Wrexham—I may as well tell you her name—will be of age in about six months. And then," he adds, in a hesitating kind of way, "I should like your wife to see her. And—and—we shall be going by Devizes, you know."

"Yes?"

"Well—the fact is—Miss Wrexham has plenty of pluck, you understand; and if your wife were so awfully good-natured as to send her a little bit of a note, she'd drive over to some appointed place—she and her sister drive all about the country in a little pony-chaise of their own; and then Murdoch could hold the pony; and the two girls pop into the saloon; and you'd give them a snack of lunch. I think it would be

very jolly — they're rattling nice girls — plenty of fun in them ——"

"And this is what you call obeying the Vice-Chancellor's order, is it?" one demands of him.

"Oh! *I* should have nothing to do with it. If your wife asks two young ladies to come and look at a house-boat, how can I help it? I'll sit dumb all the time if you like."

"What kind of treatment do they give you in Holloway?"

"Not at all bad, if you're a first-class misdemeanant."

"Do they crop your hair?"

"Certainly not!" (He seemed to have been making inquiries.)

"Anything to drink?"

"A pint of claret with your dinner, or something of that sort."

"Books?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then you could fill in the time with reviews and short notices. All right; we'll consider that project when we get along into Wiltshire."

Just as we arrived at the entrance of the hotel, we could see the other members of our party coming across the College Green—through the dappled sun and shade beneath the trees. Notwithstanding her partly-veiled face, it was clear that Miss Peggy was laughing merrily; and Colonel Cameron, who was apparently responsible for this breach of Sabbath decorum, had his eyes fixed on the ground; Queen Tita was looking elsewhere.

"By Jove, what a handsome girl that is!" said Jack Duncombe, involuntarily, as he, too, caught sight of the tall young lady.

"Has that never struck you before?"

"Oh! yes, of course—but somehow—in the open sunlight —when you see her at a distance—her figure tells so well ——"

"Now that one thinks of it, my young friend, for a person engaged to be married, you seemed to pay a good deal of attention to Miss Rosslyn at one time, and that not so long ago. One might have been excused for thinking that you had serious views ——"

"About Miss Rosslyn," said he, with evident surprise. "No surely not! I have cheek for most things; but not for that!"

Well; this was a modest speech, at any rate.

"Of course, being so much with her on the boat," he said, "there were plenty of chances of becoming very friendly; and I dare say, being shut off from the rest of the world like that, a kind of mutual confidence sprang up: besides, when a girl is exceedingly pretty, and very good-natured, and full of high spirits and enjoyment, you want to make yourself as agreeable as you can ——"

"Oh! you do; do you?"

"Why, naturally!"

"But without prejudice to the young lady under the guardianship of the Vice-Chancellor?"

"I am quite sure of this, that Miss Rosslyn has perfectly understood our relations all the way through," he answered. "I am quite certain of that. Why, if I had been quite free from any engagement, I could not have presumed—I would not have presumed—to regard her with any ambitious hopes of that kind."

"Really!" In truth, the young man's humility was quite touching.

"Besides," he said, in a lower voice (for they were now crossing the street), "it is as clear as noonday who absorbs all her interest now. A precious lucky fellow he is—that is my opinion."

Of course there was no further word to be said; for the newcomers were here; and together we went up the steps of the hotel and made for the coffee-room—the women-folk not staying to remove their bonnets. They had a great deal to say about Norman gateways, and beautiful windows, and impressive music; and it was not for some time that one had an opportunity of pointing out to them the distinguished honour that was now being done them.

"You wouldn't be chattering like that," one remarked to them at length; "you would be silent with a reverential awe—if you only knew who was seated at this table."

"Who?"—and there was a startled glance round for Banquo's ghost.

"A Reviewer! There—look at him—he seems harmless enough—but he has become an adjudicator of life and death—the Bloody Assises begin to-morrow ——"

"Is it true, Mr. Duncombe?" Queen Tita cried forthwith.

"Have you turned critic?"

"Only in a small way," he said, lightly. "There are some books coming down to-morrow, I believe."

"Oh, we'll all help you!" Miss Peggy exclaimed, with generous ardour. "We'll read them from end to end—every line—and give you the most disinterested opinions ——"

"That is precisely what I want," said he, instantly rising to the occasion. "I want to astonish my editor-friend. He has asked only for paragraphs; but I'll show him what paragraphs can be—an epigram in every line, or I'm a Dutchman! Isn't it lucky I happened to bring my memorandum-book? You remember, Miss Rosslyn, when I ventured to show you some of my jottings—well, they didn't seem to meet with general approval—perhaps, being detached in that way ——"

"Yes," said she, shyly, "they *did* sound rather detached, didn't they?"

"But when I can insert them cunningly into a critical notice—when I can lead up to them—it will be quite different. Well, I'll take you all into my confidence. After dinner to-night, I will submit some more of those memoranda for your judgment—and you must be quite frank: you needn't fear *my* pride being wounded. Then you might give me suggestions as to how to use them."

"Hadn't we better wait for the books?" Queen Tita suggested, as a member of this Joint-Stock Critical Company.

"Oh, no," rejoined the Short-noticer, "you can sample the raw materials, and then I'll see how they can be made up for use afterwards. Of course, if they don't strike you as being worth anything, then I'll drop them at once."

After luncheon we got a carriage and drove away out to the famous downs of which Bristol is very naturally proud. It was a beautiful afternoon—a light westerly wind tempering the hot glare of the sun; and there was everywhere a summerlike pro-

fusion of foliage and blossom—of red and white hawthorn, of purple lilac and golden laburnum—in the pretty gardens that front the long-ascending Whiteladies-road. Arrived at the downs, we of course proceeded on foot, across the undulating pasture land bestarred with squat hawthorn-bushes, that were now all powdered over with pink-white or cream-white bloom. The view from these heights was magnificent: beyond the luxuriant woods in the neighbourhood of the Avon, which were all golden-green in the warm afternoon light, the wide landscape retreated fold upon fold and ridge upon ridge to the high horizon line, becoming bluer and bluer till lost in the pale southern sky. It was only here or there that some far hill or hamlet, some church-spire, or wood-crowned knoll, caught that golden glow, and shone faint and dim; mere distance subdued all local colour; and the successive landscape waves that rolled out to the horizon were but so many different shades of atmospheric azure, lightening or deepening according to the nature of the country. Of topographical knowledge we had none; we only knew that this was a bit of England; and a very fair and pleasant sight it seemed to be.

And then, again, from these lofty heights, we made our way down the steep slopes that overhang the river, by pathways flecked with sunlight and shade, and through umbrageous woods that offered a welcome shelter on this hot afternoon. Truly Bristol is a fortunate city to have such picturesque and pleasant open spaces in her immediate neighbourhood; and she has done wisely in not employing too much of the art of the landscape-gardener. There is sufficient of the wilderness about these hanging woods—though there are also smooth winding ways for those who object to scrambling and climbing. And on this quiet Sunday evening both Queen Tita and her young American friend distinctly refused to quit the common, familiar paths. It was in vain that Mr. Jack Duncombe endeavoured to lure them into the pursuit of short cuts. They called him Chingachgook, and told him to go away. Colonel Cameron said he envied the Bristol boys if they were allowed to come birds'-nesting in these wilds in the early spring; the

number of blackbirds that flew shrieking this way and that through the bushes was extraordinary.

Then we climbed up again to the summit of Clifton Down (Durdham Down had been the beginning of our wanderings) and found another spacious landscape all around us—the deep chasm of the river right beneath; high in the air, but still far below us, the Suspension Bridge; over to the west the beautiful woods of Leigh; and beyond these the stretch of fertile country that lies between the Avon and the Severn. It seemed sad to think that a city like Bristol, with its famous annals and noble traditions, to say nothing of its romantic and picturesque surroundings, should in this nineteenth century be the resort and shelter of pirates. But we comforted ourselves with the assurance that by this time one or other of them must have had his head broken; perhaps two of them were murdered; more probably the whole three of them were in the police cells; and meanwhile, as our women-folk had done a good deal of walking on this warm afternoon, we proposed that they should drive back to the hotel, there being plenty of open flies at the base of the hill.

On our way into the town the time was profitably spent in giving sage advice to our young Reviewer about the new career on which he was entering; and as one after another took up the task, it was really astonishing what a number of things he was expected to do and avoid. The anxiety of these good people about his success was quite touching. They laid down rules of guidance for him; they supplied him with quotations of anything but a recondite character; they even constructed expressions for him which would be effective as coming from the critical chair. Mr. Jack Duncombe took all this "badgering" (as he was pleased to call it) good-naturedly enough; nay, he himself made merry over the phrase "the true Shakespearean touch" being applied, as it usually is applied, to this or that writer of hopeless obscurity of manner and matter.

"Why, the great minds of the world," he exclaimed—"Shakespeare, Homer, Milton, Dante—have invariably been as clear as daylight—their meaning clear as daylight—their style as clear as daylight; and when you get some fellow puddling

about in the mud-holes of metaphysics—like a duck in a horse-pond with its head under water—and you talk of him having the true Shakespearean touch ——!"

"But above all," one remarked to him, "you must preach conciseness. Drive that into their heads, whatever you do. Formerly, literature was a leisurely sort of thing; and you dawdled along with a writer, arm-in-arm, just as long as you wanted his company. But that's all over. Modern hurry won't have anything of that kind. Literature must be boiled down and compressed—Liebig's Extract—try our own condensed butter-milk. You don't lead up to a situation of interest; you reveal it by a lightning flash ——"

"That's rather a pretty derangement," he observed, casually.

"And I will give you an example, so that you may see what condensation is. Here are three lines—three short lines—

> Mr. Fraser
> Took a razor:
> 'Damme,' says he, 'but I'll amaze her'.

Now, do you see that? That is a lightning-flash situation. The whole position is described; not a superfluous word: not a single useless accessory; Mr. Fraser is the central and commanding figure: there are no 'minor characters' brought in to distract attention. Now, that is what you, as a Reviewer, must insist on. There must be no rambling. When you go to your butcher for a beef-steak, it's a beef-steak you want; why should you be expected to look at the rosettes of ribbon he has stuck on his loins of pork? Business is business—you keep them to that. Hammer it into them. Show them the legend of Mr. Fraser—that is the lightning-flash style."

"You, all of you, seem to find it rather an amusing kind of thing," he complained, meekly, "that I should have been asked to write a few notices."

"Oh, I assure you, Mr. Duncombe," Queen Tita said at once, "that we are quite seriously anxious you should succeed. And I'm sure it can be no joke for the poor trembling wretches who are awaiting your verdict."

"Oh, as for that," said he, cheerfully, "I will take a lesson

from a friend of mine, who was elected at the Reform at a time when there was a good deal of pilling going on. The only way he could think of showing his gratitude was by voting for every candidate who came on for ballot during the first twelve months after his election. If I'm to be called to the chair of Rhadamanthus, I'll begin with a year's leniency."

"That is very right, at all events, Mr. Duncombe," Miss Peggy put in approvingly; and therewith we drew up at the steps of the hotel.

At dinner we had our prospects for the morrow to discuss: but also we had our battles of the previous day to fight over again; and it was observable that Colonel Cameron lost no opportunity of magnifying the possibility of danger attending that passage down the Severn. But a soldier is no diplomatist; we knew well enough what was meant by all this talk about heavy seas and head winds and leaky timbers. It was merely to convince the two women that they had shown the most heroic courage. Well, perhaps they had. They didn't shriek when they saw the water swashing about the saloon. When we were at the roughest part of the voyage they merely sat a little silent—that was all. But one who has remarked the ways of women in somewhat similar circumstances may be pardoned for suspecting that they were in such dread of becoming sea-sick as to be quite oblivious of any other danger; and that they feared neither wind nor waves, because they had no time to think of them.

"But I can't make out," says Miss Peggy, "what that sickle of a moon was doing up there in the east at half-past two in the morning. Of course you lazy people didn't see that; but that was the first thing I noticed when I got out. And we lost the moon so long ago ——"

"But the moon is always doing ridiculous things," Jack Duncombe declares; adding, with fine audacity, "It burned blue at the battle of Dunbar."

"Oh, get out!" one says to this flippant person.

"But it did," he maintains; "for Carlyle says so in his 'Letters and Speeches of Cromwell'. You turn up and see."

Now, what was one to answer? We had not the book with us. Besides, he was a Reviewer, and what is the use of disputing with a Reviewer?

"Of course it must occasionally burn blue," observed Miss Peggy, "or what would be the meaning of the phrase, 'Once in a blue moon'?" Here was another instance of the way in which American children are brought up. Who asked for her interference in a matter being discussed by her elders?

"At all events," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "there will be no half-past two for us to-morrow morning, if we are going no further than Bath. And certainly we must wait for your parcel of books, Mr. Duncombe, even if we shouldn't start till midday. For we are going to do our very best for you—all of us. There will be such a reading, and judging, and sifting as you never heard of. I think each volume should be the subject of a general debate."

"I wonder what my editor-friend will think of these inspired paragraphs," Mr. Duncombe remarked, modestly. "I shouldn't wonder if he felt quite ashamed to reflect that he had put me on to short notices. The most likely thing is that he will at once ask me to come and edit the paper in his place."

But the worst of it was that while we were thus conspiring together to write a series of short reviews such as the world had never seen the like of before, we presently found that we were to get next to no help from the materials stored up in Jack Duncombe's notebook. When dinner had been cleared away, and cigars and claret placed on the table in our quiet little sitting-room, the young man proceeded, with the utmost frankness, to submit for our judgment the various observations, epigrams, metaphors, gibes, and so forth, that he had recently jotted down; but what could we do with them—or rather, what could he do with them? Here and there one or other of them might have been introduced into the dialogue of a play, or into the conversation of a novel; but the horse and the Horse-Marine hauling in front, and five able-bodied men shoving behind, couldn't have got these quips and japes lugged into a newspaper article. Not that he complained of our objections. No.

What he sought, he said, was honest help and counsel; and if these memoranda were impracticable for his present purpose, they might come in useful at some future time.

"Here, now," he went on, regarding the small scribbled pages, "is a woman so convinced of her son's inability to do anything that she says, 'Well, if you want to see the Thames frozen over, you just get our Jim to try and set it on fire'. Couldn't I make some use of that? Couldn't I say it of the author of a bad book?"

"No," said Miss Peggy, promptly, "not for a year, at least. For a year you are to say nothing cruel."

"Very well; how about this?—'An Irishman thinks of what he can do to worry England; an Englishman thinks of what he can do for himself; a Scotchman thinks of what he can do for Bonny Scotland'."

"Well, now, that is very good—that is very good, indeed!" Queen Tita exclaimed, with unusual warmth. "That is excellent, Mr. Duncombe!"

But Mr. Duncombe made answer, rather sadly:

"I perceive that the merit of an aphorism doesn't lie in its truth, but in the way it appeals to one's prejudices. I know, for myself, that I always consider an article extremely well-written and unanswerable when it expresses my own view of a subject. However, I don't see my way to use that, until I come across a Scotch editor."

Sir Ewen Cameron, it will be observed, was not taking any part in these literary discussions. But he listened—especially when Miss Peggy joined in; and he had secured a comfortable lounging-chair; and his cigar seemed to afford him satisfaction. Jack Duncombe continued:

"Here are a lot of similes and metaphors—or, rather, metaphorical phrases—that I fancy could be worked in, to give a little touch of picturesqueness, don't you know. 'As crabbed and vexatious as the bones of a red mullet.' Couldn't one say that of a writer's style? Or of his temper? I think so. 'As hoarse as a black-throated diver'——"

"But wait a bit—is the black-throated diver a particularly hoarse bird?" one ventures to ask.

"I haven't the least idea," he says, coolly; "but then, neither has anyone else. And it looks knowing. Oh, yes; I'll find plenty of use for these phrases. I'll dot them all over my sentences to give them a kind of picturesqueness. But what's this?—it opens well, at any rate: 'If, in the deeps of the abysmal forests'—doesn't that sound fine?"

"Very fine, indeed!" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"'If, in the deeps of the abysmal forests, some fifty millions of ages ago, there had lived an ancient seer—a hoary and prophetic ape—a quadrumanous Merlin—who could have looked into futurity and foreseen that the development of his kind would lead to the production of Offenbach's music and the facetiousness of the thorough-bred Cockney, wouldn't he have gone down on his knees, and wept, and howled, and prayed to the gods for the instant annihilation of the entire race?' That sounds very splendid; but I'm afraid it would involve me in controversy. Hello—here's more about evolution: 'For millions and millions of years Nature's system provided that the wild beasts of the earth should prey upon each other, thus effecting a fair kind of compromise. But in these latter days a new species of predatory animal has sprung up, on whom there is no check whatever, and the various races of mankind are left helpless before its furious and savage attacks ——'"

Here he suddenly, but very quietly, closed the book; and methodically put the elastic band round it; and consigned it to his pocket. In Miss Peggy's eyes there was a quick glimmer of laughing intelligence; Mrs. Threepenny-bit and the Colonel, on the other hand, sat wondering.

"Yes, but you didn't finish, Mr. Duncombe;" said the former. "Who or what are these predatory animals?"

"That was written before your conversion, Mr. Duncombe?" Miss Peggy said, looking at him.

"Yes," he answered, gravely. "Now I am called Paul."

And then, without any further explanation, he proceeded to say that, after all, Queen Tita was right; and that it would be

bette- to wait for the books themselves to suggest opportunities for the dovetailing in of these fragments of personal experience or reflection. But he counted on our collaboration none the less, he said. The Nameless Barge, during the next day or two, was to become a kind of reviewing-shop; with a number of industrious apprentices all working away at the same job, or series of jobs. Nothing was said about remuneration; perhaps the astonishment and delight and abundant gratitude of the British public were to be our sufficient and glorious reward.

But it was not at all about Mr. Duncombe's future career as a critic that Mrs. Threepenny-bit was concerned when, later on that night, a chance occurred of communicating to her the news of his engagement. At first she professed nothing but a lofty acquiescence. She hoped that the objections of the mamma and of the guardians were founded on nothing but prejudice, and would be removed: as far as she was aware, Mr. Duncombe was a very well conducted, agreeable, and rather clever young man. And if, as she presumed, the young lady was well off, and if the marriage took place, they would probably settle down in the country, with perhaps a house in town; and he would give up dabbling in those vague literary pursuits that promised him nothing but inky fingers and disappointed ambition. He would be better employed in fencing plantations than in writing farces for comic theatres. So it may be said that she somewhat coldly approved.

But presently she asked this question:

"And Mr. Duncombe was actually engaged to be married when he started with us at the beginning of this trip?"

"Undoubtedly. He says so."

"Well; it is no business of mine. But I cannot imagine why he should have kept his engagement a secret. It seems to me that when an unmarried man is asked to make up a party of this kind, and conceals the fact of his being engaged—well, it is very like joining under false pretences."

Which was rather a strange speech for a woman who had declared again and again that she had not a single match-making idea in her head when we planned the voyage of the Nameless Barge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Thus, thus I steer my bark, and sail
On even keel with gentle gale;
* * * * * *
And once in seven years I'm seen
At Bath or Tunbridge to careen."

"THE top of the morning to you!" says Miss Peggy, coming marching into the coffee-room, and twirling her bonnet by the strings. There is a gay audacity in her face, and health and youth and high spirits are in her shining eyes.

"The same to you and many of them," one answers, humbly.

"I do believe," she continues, in tones of tragic vexation, "that your English bootmakers are the immediate descendants of the people who lived in the Age of Iron. Why, French and German bootmakers use leather! But your English bootmakers fix your feet with iron clamps."

"So your racing and chasing on Durham and Clifton Downs have found you out—is that it? Well, you'll have to come better provided to the Highlands—boots with broad toes, double-soled, and with plenty of nails in them to get a grip of the heather."

"I am not so sure about my ever going to the Highlands," she says, with something of a change of manner; and she walks along to the window and looks out. Then she returns. "Won't you go for a little stroll until they come down? It is quite pretty out there."

This is a command rather than an invitation: one fetches hat and stick; Miss Peggy whips on her bonnet and ties the strings; and presently we are lounging about the College-green which looks very well in the early sunlight. And the sunlight suits Miss Peggy, too, brightening the pale, clear rose of her complexion, and lending a mystery to her shadowed eyes, and

making a wonder and glory of her hair, as many a poor hapless mortal, on both sides of the Atlantic, has discovered to his cost.

"Has Mr. Duncombe's parcel of books come?" she asks presently.

"I don't know."

"Do you think he will succeed as a writer?" again she asks in her careless way

"How can one tell? He hasn't got very far yet."

"He is very modest about it," she says; and then, as on one or two former occasions, she goes on to speak of Mr. Duncombe in rather a cool and critical fashion. "His simplicity is almost amusing. He doesn't aim at much, does he? Rather a small ambition, wouldn't you call it, to be writing these little things, and making up plots for farces? Why, if I were a man, I'd win the Victoria Cross or die!" she adds, with superfluous energy.

"Good gracious! if everybody wanted the V.C., how would the world's business go on?"

"I'm talking about myself personally," she says, resolutely.

"To begin with, you would have to be a soldier."

"I would be a soldier."

"You would want an opportunity ——"

"I would make an opportunity."

"Yes, that's just where the trouble comes in. Don't you know that some very high authorities have looked rather askance at the V.C. as a temptation to the young soldier to fight for his own hand. And yet they say that at the First Relief of Lucknow every single man of the 78th Highlanders fought for a Victoria Cross—and, what's more, that every single man earned it ——"

"And what was done then?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Why, they left the regiment itself to choose their representatives to get the cross. But the fact is, no Highland soldier should get the V.C. ——"

"What?" she says, indignantly.

"No Highland soldier should get the V.C. For when the critical occasion comes—when a charge has to be made or a trench to be stormed, then the pipes begin to play, and the

Highlander becomes a madman—he is no longer himself It is unfair all the way round. The pipes madden him and frighten his enemy at the same time. When Sir Archibald Alison called on the pipers to strike up at Amoaful, the Ashantees bolted like rabbits, and the Black Watch couldn't get at them. Well, I hope you will hear a pibroch or two in the Highlands this year: what makes you think you won't be able to go?"

"Oh, as for that," she says, with rather a proud and hurt air, "I am sure I am at liberty to go, for anything my people at home seem to care about me. They don't appear to be much concerned as to whether I go or stay."

"No letters this morning?"

"Oh, it isn't this morning—or many a morning back. I don't believe I've heard from home since I left London; and I've written regularly to my sister Emily, every Sunday, sometimes oftener."

"Don't you think they assume that you have withdrawn altogether into the wilds, and that it is no use trying to find you? Or isn't it just as likely that there has been some mistake about forwarding your letters; and that you will find them all in a bundle when you get back to town? We shall soon be making a bee-line for London now."

"Those people have come down," she says, discreetly glancing over to the windows of the hotel; "we must go in."

It was now for the first time that a foreshadowing of the breaking-up of our party began to weigh upon the spirits of one or two of these good folk—particularly upon Colonel Cameron, who became remarkably glum and silent when we were counting up the days it would take us to reach the Thames. Not so with young Duncombe, however.

"Oh, it's no use thinking about that yet," said he. "We've all the Avon and the Kennet to do; and we'll soon be away from these towns and into the solitudes again. You didn't build the Nameless Barge to go on a round of visits to cities. There are plenty of delightful stretches of country for you to get through before we say good-bye"

"But for letters, Mr. Duncombe," his hostess said (and she was as polite and courteous to him as ever: it was not to him that she was going to say anything about his having come away with us under false pretences), "shouldn't we decide where the expedition is to end? And not only that, but one or two friends promised to come and meet us at the finish ——"

"Oh, I see," said this ingenious young man instantly, "'As You Like It' winds up with a dance—at least they don't always do it on the stage, but that was what the Duke ordered. Well, we've been in the Forest of Arden—at least, you have been—and there ought to be a little dance before we separate. Oh, yes, we must have a little fling for the last—a Highland fling, if Colonel Cameron prefers it. We strike the Thames at Reading; very well; we can slip down the river to Henley, and put up at the Red Lion. Henley will be a capital place to leave the boat at, for it will be wanted at the regatta, either by yourselves or some of your friends. And of course we should finish up with a dance: you ask the people, and leave all the arrangements to me."

"And the next morning?" Queen Tita remarked, rather adly. "Well, I've said many harsh things about that old boat, but I shall be sorry to leave it. It has taken us into some strange places; and we've had many and many a snug evening together; and I dare say, long days hereafter, when we come together again, there will be plenty to talk over ——"

"When you bring Miss Rosslyn to the Highlands with you in the autumn," Colonel Cameron put in quickly. "By that time the whole trip will have become a beatified kind of thing in one's memory; and, as you say, there will be plenty to talk over—plenty ——"

"I am sure of this, Sir Ewen," is the rejoinder—and this diminutive major-domo of a woman has an air as if she were herself the proprietor of all the land and seas between the Mull of Cantire and the Butt of Lewis—"I am sure of this, that if we get Peggy with us in the West Highlands she won't want to look back—she'll have enough to do in looking round."

Miss Peggy is silent. Perhaps she does not want to distress

these good friends, who are planning schemes for her delight, by telling them that, after all, she may not be able to go.

Now, in all our wanderings hitherto, we had encountered next to nothing of the slumminess that is supposed to be characteristic of canals; but we were about to get a good solid dose of it at Bristol—for a brief space. When we had our things packed, we drove out towards the bit of canal that connects the Floating Harbour with the Avon: and, having put our portmanteaus (and Jack Duncombe's parcel of books) on the top of the bank, we dismissed the cabs, and calmly awaited the coming of our house-boat. A most squalid neighbourhood was this: the streets grimy; the air pungent with vitriolic fumes; the sky pierced with a hundred chimneys. A populous neighbourhood, too, though the people did not appear to be doing anything; they lounged about the bridge, leaning over the parapet; or they stared at our luggage and ourselves with an absent air. But when, after long waiting, we beheld the Nameless Barge approach (it was being towed by a small steamer, with the owner of which Captain Columbus had established friendly terms) there was a vast commotion among these idlers; and quite a crowd swarmed down the bank to witness our embarkation and departure. The curiosity of these worthy folk was of the most artless kind. Their comments were uttered without any shamefaced reserve. They did not literally come on board; but they craned their necks—at risk of falling into the water—in order to gain a glimpse into the saloon. Miss Peggy seemed to attract a good deal of their attention; and that young lady, standing on the thwart across the stern-sheets, appeared to be demurely unconscious of their scrutiny. Then the horse was attached; the raree-show began to glide away; and presently we had left that idle population behind, and were slowly passing through malodorous suburbs, that seemed to consist almost exclusively of manufactories.

However, when we had got down by a couple of locks into the wider waters of the Avon, the world began to grow a little greener again. There were still chimneys here and there, and spelter works; but also there were steep red cliffs hanging with

foliage, and, on the other side, level meadows catching a faint shimmer of sunlight. Nay, we came upon a long railway-embankment that was exceedingly picturesque; for the line, being far above us, was invisible; and what we saw was a series of Norman arches half smothered in heavy clusters of ivy. We were becoming quite reconciled to the yellow colour of the Avon, because of the beauty of these steep banks and the luxuriant foliage. Here and there, where there happened to be a clearance among the trees, masses of wild-flowers showed themselves—particularly of the red campion. There were the huge leaves of the butterbur along the edge of the stream. And from time to time the soft summer air around us was sweet with the scent of the hawthorn blossom.

"Mr. Duncombe," says Miss Peggy, as we are gliding smoothly along, under high wooded banks, or by the side of level meads, "when are we to see the books you are going to review?"

The young man glances at her somewhat suspiciously.

"I don't see why you should find so much amusement in the notion that I am going to try a little reviewing," he makes answer. "But I don't bear any malice. I propose we open the parcel now. Let's have Murdoch called to take the tiller; then we can all go into the saloon—a Council of Five. But mind, it's your co-operation I want; not sarcasm. And I don't see anything funny about it myself: why shouldn't I write reviews as well as other people?"

"What is this that has come unto the son of Kish?" says Queen Tita, darkly; and then she rises and takes Miss Peggy's hand in hers. "Come along, Peggy; let's go and see the books.

> "'Come down the cabin-stair,
> And comb your yellow hair,
> Said the Captain unto pretty Peggy, O.'"

"What is that?" the younger lady asks, as she follows her hostess into the saloon.

"Oh, I don't know," the other answers, lightly. "A bit of an old song. I don't remember any more of it. But that's always the way: it's pretty Peggy who is asked to go down below, and make herself smart, and take her place at the

captain's table; while plain Susan, or Moll, or Bridget can remain on deck, and nibble dried herring. Now, Mr. Duncombe, your knife, please! I think, Peggy, as we are women, our curiosity should be gratified first."

Accordingly, when the string had been cut, and the pile of books laid bare, these two forward creatures took the whole matter of investigation into their own hands; and the very first volume that Queen Tita seized upon caused her to break forth into a most unseemly giggle.

"Mr. Duncombe, what are your views upon this question?" she asked.

"What question?" said he.

She gravely handed him the book; it was entitled: "On the Management of Infancy". But did these two sniggering fiends think to disconcert him? Then they were mistaken.

"Oh," said he, as bold as a lion, "you needn't think I am so ignorant. Views?—I have plenty of views. Haven't I read Mr. Spencer's treatise on Education? Very well. Either this writer approves, or protests against, the process of hardening children. Whichever position he takes up, I can face him, and remonstrate with him, and talk to him like a father. The worst of it is," he continued seriously (and one of us began to suspect that it was not he, but his persecutors, who were being trifled with), "that I don't believe I ever jotted down a single saying about children—I don't believe there is one anywhere in any of my notebooks. Isn't that a pity? You see, that's just where the bother is: you can't make those things to order; and what memoranda you do put down seem never to be wanted. But I must have a flash, you know—a scintillation—here and there—something pointed and epigrammatic and luminous—even if it's only about infants. Infants! Who ever thought of making epigrams about infants? They are not worth the trouble—the horrid little idiots! But still—still—I must have a flash or two."

Miss Peggy took up a volume.

"'Modern Hinduism?' What will you say about that, Mr. Duncombe?" she asked.

"Modern Hinduism?" he repeated. "Well, you see, one great advantage is that I don't know anything at all about it. I have no prejudices or prepossessions. My mind is virgin soil. If the man instructs me properly, I will thank him; if he amuses me, I will thank him still more; but if he is a dull dog, I will arise and smite him in the eye."

"Oh, no; you can't do that," she interposed, "not for a year, at least."

Then it was Queen Tita's turn.

"'Gout in its Relation to the Liver,'" she read out, seriously. "Have you studied that subject, Mr. Duncombe?"

"Thank goodness, no!" our Reviewer exclaimed—heedless of the responsibilities of his craft; and then he added, "Now, how is anybody to bring in lightning-flashes—coruscations—things of that kind—when you're writing about the liver?"

"Be wise, instead," said Colonel Cameron. "An old doctor-friend of mine used to say that the liver was the conscience of the body, that told you when you had done anything wrong. Now, there is an axiom for you—couldn't you work that in?"

"I might; but if your doctor-friend were to come along and claim the copyright?"

"Poor fellow, he's not likely to do that," Sir Ewen answered; "his bones are at the bottom of the Red Sea."

"I'll jot it down anyway," said our Short-noticer, thankfully. "Maybe it will come in. But I never undertook to become epigrammatic about gout. That wasn't in the contract. You'll have to give me an easier one. What's that, there, Miss Rosslyn?"—for Miss Rosslyn was grinning.

"I think you have a famous opportunity here," Miss Peggy said, "although it is only a pamphlet: 'The Modern Stage and its Critics'. Doesn't that give you a chance? I see names mentioned. You might wipe off some old scores."

"What?" he said, indignantly. "Abuse a position of trust to serve private malice? Never! What do you take me for?"

"Ah," she said, "I perceive: you're one of themselves now."

"Nevertheless," said he, thoughtfully—and he stretched out

his hand for the pamphlet—"it is just possible one might have a public duty to fulfil. I wonder if Biddles is mentioned—or MacMurtough, of the *Whack*—or poor old Tommy Swills, who can hardly hold up an opera-glass with his gouty fingers ——"

"Look at him!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in an awestruck aside. "Look at the baleful fire gathering in his eyes!"

"I don't say," he continued, loftily, "that I would have asked to be allowed to review this pamphlet. No. There is nothing more loathsome and contemptible than malice—private malice—striking with cowardly hand in the dark; and you would naturally avoid even any semblance of that. But supposing you have a public duty to perform, in the interests of the stage; and if these fellows have been making use of *their* opportunities to air their aversions and prejudices and venal favouritism——"

"Then the Lord has delivered them into your hand," Sir Ewen said, in a kind of joyful fashion, as if he sniffed the battle from afar. "I am more interested in that review than in any of the others; I hope we shall all have a chance of seeing it before the party breaks up."

"And then, again," the young man continued, "when I promised to exercise leniency for a year, that was with regard to the authors of books, not their subjects. I may curse gout as much as I like, if I am civil to the man who writes about gout. In the same way, I may say what I like about these stage-critics—oh, don't I know the brutes —— !"

"Mr. Duncombe—Mr. Duncombe!" Queen Tita exclaimed. "I am really ashamed of you! That is not the mood in which you should set about examining a literary production, whatever its subject may be. Goodness gracious, you should be as calm, and dispassionate, and phlegmatic as an owl. I really don't think you should notice that pamphlet at all."

"But the interests of the public!" he exclaimed. "The interests of the public demand it! Besides, on *that* subject I've got about thirty aphorisms all ready—I'll stick them in as thick as plums in a pudding. Oh, I assure you I never expected to get such a chance."

He looked inquiringly at the pile of books over which the

two women were hovering, as if it were a bran-pie. Queen Tita took up the next volume.

"'Fluctuations in General Prices: their Cause and Cure,'" she read aloud, without any comment.

For a second the young man looked rather staggered.

"Yes that *is* a facer," he remarked, slowly. "Still, the humbly receptive mind may find something to say even about that."

"'Shakespeare and Ben Jonson: a Comparative Study,'" she went on.

"Ah, well, there now," he cried, brightening up at once—"there, now, is something I should like to write about. I don't care which side the man takes; I'll cut out my own line; I'll back the magic romanticism of Shakespeare against the realism of Ben Jonson at anything you like—a hundred to one—a hundred to nothing! Romanticism against realism—that's my tip; I know which has the stronger staying power. I'll back Dumas in the long run to knock Balzac into a cocked hat. Why—but, hello, what's that ——?"

For indeed this elegant excursus in the domain of criticism—the Newer Criticism—was summarily cut short by the stoppage of the boat; and when one went out to see what the matter was, Captain Columbus, on the bank, was good enough to inform us that we were now near to Keynsham, which would be an opportune place for baiting the horse. We acquiesced in this arrangement; Columbus, the horse, and the Horse-Marine departed; and Murdoch, no longer wanted at the tiller, was summoned into the saloon to provide us with some snack of luncheon—that bundle of books being swept into a corner for the present.

Well, it was during this foregathering that Miss Peggy—listening to our random talk—was at length driven to confess that she thought she would be unable to go to the Highlands with us that autumn. Mrs. Threepenny-bit seemed somewhat startled, and looked at the girl curiously: it was clear that she suspected there might be occult reasons for this decision which it would be better not to inquire too curiously about. Indeed,

when Miss Peggy was invited to give us some kind of excuse for this change of plan, her answer was vague enough.

"I want to know that I have a home," she said, with downcast eyes. "They have let me drift away too far. If I were once back in America, among my own people, I dare say I should soon be ready to start away again; but at present I feel just a little lost."

So she went on with her nebulous explanations; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit listened, and said nothing. It was easy to divine that the small creature was distracted by very divergent hopes and desires. Was Peggy then—after all the magnifying of the Highlanders and the Highland regiments, and her interest in the clans, and her pity for the misfortunes of Bonnie Prince Charlie—was Peggy to go away back to Brooklyn before her education was completed by a visit to Inverfask and the Western Isles? On the other hand—in view of certain contingencies—was it not entirely advisable that the girl should return to her own people forthwith, and remain in the clear atmosphere of America until certain cobwebs of Old-World romance had got blown out of her head? Driving in Prospect Park, or pacing the sands at Long Branch, she would soon forget that she had ever seen any particular fascination in the fancy of having a piper marching up and down outside the dining-room window, with the pipes screaming away at "Lord Breadalbane's March" or "Wha'll be King but Charlie?"

But this mild balancing and "swithering" was very different from the energetic protest of Colonel Cameron.

"Why, Miss Rosslyn, I have been looking on it as a definite engagement that you two ladies should pay a visit to Inverfask this autumn. I don't think I can let you off. I have been planning excursions—indeed the whole thing is arranged; and I cannot allow you to treat me so badly as that. Oh, no, if you think of it, it is hardly fair ——"

She glanced at him rather timidly.

"I may be able to come back to England," she said, vaguely.

"But you don't seem to have any special reason for returning to America just at present," said he.

"Well, no," she admitted; "not any very special reason, perhaps. It is more a feeling than anything else. I should like to know what is going on at home. And it seems to me that I have been an outcast and a vagrant long enough."

In this indeterminate fashion the matter was allowed to rest for the moment; but it was obvious that it was weighing on Sir Ewen Cameron's mind. He did not take the customary interest in our arrangements for starting again, when Columbus and the Horse-Marine had come back; and subsequently, when we had to get through one or two locks, he did not lend a hand as usual. A smurr of rain had come over; like the rest of us he had put on a waterproof; and he merely stood in the stern-sheets, idly looking away over the wet landscape, and towards some low-lying hills that were as ghostly shadows, behind the pall of grey mist. Nay, in one of the locks, when Miss Peggy had espied some clusters of the small purple toad-flax, and also an abundance of hart's-tongue fern, and expressed a wish to have some of these, it was Jack Duncombe who came to her aid. Colonel Cameron looked thoughtful and anxious; and paid but little heed to what was going on.

But by-and-by the afternoon began to clear. The clouds gradually lifted; and there were gleams of lemon yellow among the soft purples and greys. The still waters of the winding Avon mirrored every feature of the bank; and further off the skies were reflected too—a shimmer of silver here and there, a breadth of liquid lilac darkening almost to black under the trees; while over the glassy surface darted innumerable swifts and martins, busy in the still, warm, moist air. By this time, of course, waterproofs had been thrown aside; and as we came to a convenient landing-place, the boat was stopped as we got ashore —all but Jack Duncombe, who was eager to get at his books.

Now it was Sir Ewen Cameron who assisted Miss Peggy to step along the gangboard; and when she had reached the bank these two naturally went on together—at first walking pretty smartly so as to get ahead of the horse. Queen Tita was in no such hurry.

"What is taking that girl back to America?" she asks presently, looking away along the tow-path towards those two.

"Who can tell? She doesn't seem to know herself!"

"But perhaps she is right," this small person continues, rather wistfully. "Yes; even if it is only some vague kind of feeling. And if she was once over there, and were to come back, then we couldn't be held responsible for anything that might happen. Of course, I hope she will come back. It is very curious what a hold that girl gets over one, when once you know her well; how you can't help mixing her up with all your plans and forecasts; why, I declare, England wouldn't be half England to me if I didn't know that, sooner or later, I could look forward to seeing my Peggy again."

"Your Peggy!"

"Yes, indeed," she continues, boldly. "Oh, anyone could see how all you men have been fighting for her good graces—for a word or a smile or a look; but she has kept to me all the time. Do you think she doesn't know what men are? I wish I could let you hear some of her confidences! Perhaps you would like to know?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, when I think of it, I don't believe you would."

"So that is her gratitude, is it, and her honesty? Pretending to be friends with everybody on board; and then, at night, in the secrecy of the ladies' cabin, making base revelations and sarcasms? Ordinary folk would say that that was the conduct of a sneak."

"She is not a sneak!" this infinitesimal firebrand exclaims, blazing up in a minute. "She is my dear friend; and I wish I knew many like her. Yes, I wish there were many women like her in England or America, or anywhere else. Oh, I know her faults. I know Peggy." And here Mrs. Three-penny-bit suddenly alters her manner, and laughs a little, to herself. "Yes—she's a wretch; and I can't deny it. But I love her; and that's all I have got to say about her."

And it was a good deal to say; for this Jenny-wren of a disciplinarian is accustomed to judge of her young women friends by a rather severe standard of conduct and aim. But then, again, as has been pointed out in these pages once or twice, Miss

Peggy was rather pleasant-looking—in a kind of way, that is; and a bright complexion, a smiling mouth, and clear-shining eyes make for favour and leniency; besides which, she was a kind of solitary young creature, away from her native country and her friends, and, therefore, to be protected and regarded with gentleness. She had been called a White Pestilence, it is true; but that was in bygone days. And now that there was a chance of our losing her altogether, it was not only Mrs. Threepenny-bit who loathed the prospect: by what right were the United States of America about to take away from us our pretty Peggy?

Poor Peggy! She seemed most unusually grave when we had all to get on board again—for we were now drawing near to Bath. Not only that, but she appeared to be at once absent-minded and apprehensive: subsiding into a deep reverie from time to time, and yet anxiously responding to any remark addressed to her, so that her thoughtfulness might not be noticed. She had no further quips and questions about Jack Duncombe's bundle of books. She took some tea in silence. And then these two women-folk had to be left by themselves; for we were now getting to the end of the day's voyage; and Captain Columbus, outside, was awaiting orders.

The approach to the beautiful Queen of the West, by the valley of the Avon, is disappointing in the extreme; indeed, the slums here are about as bad as those of the Totterdown suburb of Bristol. Our appearance in these squalid outskirts was the signal for a mighty flutter of excitement; from all quarters there came rushing a multitude of ragged mudlarks—between five and fifteen their ages seemed for the most part to range—not one of whom, as far as we could see, was possessed of cap or bonnet; and these formed our ever-increasing escort as we slowly passed along the muddy waters. Nor was the general perturbation confined to those on foot; everywhere windows were thrown open, and dishevelled heads thrust out; there were calls from this house to that; and echoing answers from below. When at last we stopped at one of the quays—amid cranes, and piles of wood, and coal, and what not—the crowd

grew greater than ever; and it was all that Murdoch, armed with a boat-hook, could do to keep those betattered arabs rom swarming over the roof of the house.

It was abundantly manifest that here was no abiding place for us; again—and for the last time on this trip—we should have to sleep ashore; and so, when a few things had been put into the various hand-bags, we set off, a small procession, through the streets of Bath, putting up at a hotel where, notwithstanding our suspicious want of luggage, we were made fairly welcome and furnished with rooms.

"This will be the last of the towns, anyway," Jack Duncombe said—as if by way of general apology. "To-morrow we shall be off into the wilds again; and nothing more will be heard of us until we appear in the Thames."

And then again, while we were at dinner, he said—

"Don't you think that, now we are in Bath, we should devote the evening to fashion and frivolity? Suppose we call for chairs, and go off to the play; or perhaps there is a ball at the Assembly Rooms—with all the great folk there? I'll tell you what I should like to see as we were going in—we might just come upon them—the young lady, very pretty, of course, with high-waisted muslin dress, fan, and a feather or two in her hair—the young gentleman in long-tailed coat, ruffles, and rosettes; and she is all palpitation and fright, and he is all courage and devotion, as he wraps her cloak round her and puts the hood over her head. Then, you must imagine the chariot, and horses, and postillion just round the corner; the young lady trips along, and pops in, her spark following; and then, hey! for Gretna-green. That's what I would call an incident, now—Gretna-green in a ball-dress—there's some romance in that. But when we came through those dull and dead and sombre streets this evening, who could have believed that anything of the kind ever happened in Bath?"

We did not go to either ball or play; but perhaps it was to be in sympathy with the spirit and traditions of the place that, a little later on, when the table had been cleared, cards were produced, and a mild game of *vingt-et-un* begun. It was with some difficulty that Miss Peggy—who was still unaccountably reserved in manner

and *distraite*—was induced to join; but Jack Duncombe would take no denial: accordingly, when she drew in her chair, she seized the first opportunity that presented itself of smuggling half-a-dozen of the cards into her lap. It was her usual custom—when she happened to be at the end of the table, and could make sure of friendly connivance. With this repertory to draw from, she seldom had much difficulty in making up the coveted twenty-one; so that her success at the game had become proverbial.

Now, some people would say that this was cheating; but that is taking a very shallow and superficial view of a serious subject. For what nobler aim can inspire the mind than to redress the inequalities of Fortune, and mitigate her harsh decrees? At this game of *vingt-et-un*, when you are dealt a ten and a two, everyone knows that, if you call for a third card, the spiteful fates will almost certainly crush you with another ten. But what if you can—without asking for any third card—simply drop the two into your lap, and replace it with an ace? Or if you happen to have fourteen in your hand, and are dealt a nine as an additional card, why should you not drop that nine if you have a seven in your lap? You are defeating the maleficent spirits who preside over games of chance. You are probably teaching a wholesome lesson to the other players: there will be the less likelihood of their becoming confirmed gamblers. It is true that it is only your own evil fortune that you amend; but doesn't the world get on very well on the principle that each man must do the best possible for himself? Everybody can't win; but by this simple expedient you make sure of one winning; and why not yourself as well as another? If the spectacle of a good man struggling with adversity be grateful to the gods, how much more the spectacle of a good man rising triumphant! Magnanimity, not selfishness, springs up and blossoms in the soul of those who hold good cards at *vingt-et-un*. How often has the present writer beheld a young lady—who shall be nameless—surreptitiously convey to her nearest neighbour a six, or a five, or a three—just as he happened to want it—instead of meanly seeking to secure all the stakes for herself?

But on this particular evening Miss Peggy would seem to

have abstracted these cards chiefly as a matter of custom—or perhaps to save trouble to the dealer; at all events, she played in a perfunctory manner, and as one who had but little heart in the game. She did not even take the trouble to win. It was Queen Tita who was winning most, and Mr. Duncombe who was losing most. At last the latter said to the former—

"I'm afraid I must trouble you to sell me a couple of dozen".

But Colonel Cameron interposed—

"Oh, no; here, I will lend you a dozen"—and he told off the counters and shoved them over: whereupon the younger man observed—rather neatly, as we thought—"Hail to the chief who in triumph advances!" and he therewith scooped together the bits of bone.

It was at this point Miss Peggy rose, begging to be excused from further play.

"Here, Mr. Duncombe," said she, "if you are losing, I bequeath you all my wealth. And I hope every one of you will win."

She went and got a book, and ensconced herself in an easy-chair—rather turning her back on us, indeed, so that the gaslight should strike on the page. But perhaps it was not to read that she had thus forsaken the card table? That night, before we separated, the humble chronicler of these events had a small folded note covertly handed to him; and, on subsequently opening it, he found it to contain these words:

"Shall you be down early to-morrow morning? I want to say something very particular to you—in private.—PEGGY."

Poor Peggy! Was it the thought of going away across the wide Atlantic again that was pressing heavily on her heart?

CHAPTER XXV.

"For who would leave, unbribed, Hibernia's land.
Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
There none are swept by sudden fate away,
But all, whom hunger spares, with age decay:
Here malice, rapine, accident conspire,
And now a rabble rages, and now a fire,
Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead."

THIS day began with glooms and disappointments; then blossomed forth into a summer-like luxuriance of all beautiful things; and finally ended in joy and calm content. Perhaps it was our general impatience of towns, and our anxiety to be away in the wilderness again, that led us to form so poor an opinion of the appearance of Bath; but anyhow the morning was wet and louring; the windows seemed dingy; and the spectacle of a crowd of people hurrying along muddy pavements, most of them with umbrellas up, to their respective shops and offices, was modern and commonplace and depressing. This was not what we had expected of the famous Queen of the West. All her former glories seemed to have vanished away behind that mournful pall of rain.

And then, again, the assignation that had been planned the evening before did not take place. Everybody seemed to come into the little sitting-room about the same moment; and Miss Peggy had no opportunity of saying a word. During breakfast she was quite silent; and thereafter, when there was a general hunt for waterproofs and umbrellas, she set about getting ready in a mechanical way, though it was chiefly for her sake we were

about to explore the town. At the door of the hotel she merely said, in an undertone—

"Some other time I will speak to you ——" and then we went out.

Now of all the interesting things in Bath, surely the most interesting is the Abbey Church, with its storied walls. These innumerable marble tablets, all ranged and crowded together, are neither ancient nor modern; many of the names are familiar; many of the families well known in the present day; and yet they speak of a time and a phase of society become strangely distant. These good people, drawn from their quiet country seats to this brilliant centre of the world, would seem to have been rather proud of burial in Bath Abbey Church and of a tablet on its walls. It was "striking for honest fame" in those days; it was securing a kind of immortality; for would not rank and fashion reign in Bath for ever? And so you can see how the biographies of these simple human beings—the details of their lineage and family connections, of their possessions, and of their doings (if any)—have been placed here on record to claim the attention of the gay, gossiping crowd. The gay, gossiping crowd! Besides ourselves—a small party of damp and melancholy strangers—there did not appear to be a soul in the place. The wits and beaux and belles and card-playing dowagers have all vanished; the famous Pump Room is almost deserted; Bath itself has fallen upon evil days; and the figures who hurry along its pavements in the pitiless rain—are no longer in resplendent attire, but in dingy garments of modern broadcloth, which get splashed with mud as the omnibuses clatter by. The immortality of these good folk buried in the Abbey (who might just as well have composed themselves to rest under the grass and daisies of their own village churchyard) did not last very long. But an occasional tourist looks in, no doubt—or perhaps a young warehouseman seeking shelter from a passing shower; and either may, if he chooses, stand before these ingenuous memorials and try to imagine for himself what kind of people swarmed to Bath when Bath was fashion's queen.

Hunting for curiosities among these mural tablets proved to be an engrossing occupation with our party; so that Miss Peggy was enabled to lag behind without being observed, while a slight finger-touch on the arm secured her the listener she wanted. The young lady seemed at once shy and anxious: there was more colour in her face than usual; and when she spoke it was in a hurried and low undertone.

"I want your advice," said she; "perhaps you may think I should speak to your wife—but—but I would rather have a man's advice. Your wife has very exalted ideas—she might be a little too uncompromising; and I would rather you would tell me what ordinary people would say and think. Besides, I spoke to you about it before. Do you remember? It was one morning on the Thames—by Magna Charta island ——"

"I remember perfectly."

"Well," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "that affair remains just where it was. I—I was really talking of myself——"

"I guessed as much."

"You did?" she said, with a quick glance.

"Yes; but of course I was not at liberty to say anything."

There was another moment of hesitation; then she began to speak, rather slowly, and with downcast eyes.

"Tell me what you think I should be justified in doing. . . . Mind, it was only a half-and-half kind of engagement—you must have guessed that, too—an understanding, indeed. . . . Both families were anxious for it . . . and—and I liked him a little—oh, yes, he is very amusing, and makes the time pass—and I daresay he liked me well enough when everything was going prosperously. Then you know how my father's affairs went wrong," she continued, with an occasional glance towards those other people to make sure they were not observing her; "and there was a change after that; and you remember I asked you whether most people wouldn't consider that a young man was quite right, and doing a sensible thing, in hesitating. Sensible?—yes, he is very sensible, and prides himself on it. Oh, I know what his ambitions are. He wants to get *among* the millionaires. He wants to run the biggest yacht

afloat, and to have paragraphs about himself in the papers. That is why he has never come to Europe; he never will come to Europe until he has money enough to get himself talked about. And then, when my father's affairs went wrong, I suppose it was but natural he should begin to think twice; and, although he has never said he wanted the engagement broken off—no, for he is afraid of quarrelling with his own people—he has left me pretty free to imagine that I can go if I choose. Oh, I am not vexed," she continued (but now her head was drawn up a little)—"I am not vexed. Of course, a girl does not like to be thrown over ——"

"You thrown over!"

"It is not quite so bad as that; for he writes to me from time to time—in a kind of a way—and I am left to understand that he considers the engagement binding if I wish it. If I wish it! I am to be the one to hold to it!—to demand execution! Well; a girl doesn't quite like that," she added, with just the least passing tremour in her voice; but doubtless it was pride rather than any sense of injury that was driving her to speak.

"So I want you to tell me what I should be justified in doing," she resumed presently. "I know what your wife would say. Yes; I know. She would say that when a girl has once promised—or even been entangled into an understanding—she is bound in honour to keep to it. Yes—but—but a girl may make herself too cheap, mayn't she?—and one ought to have some kind of self-respect ——"

"Oh, Miss Rosslyn, come along here for a minute!" a third person broke in: it was Jack Duncombe. "I have discovered the tablet put up to commemorate the illustrious virtues of Beau Nash. It's beautiful. Come along, and I will translate it for you."

So Miss Rosslyn was hailed away, somewhat to the relief of the person whom she had been consulting. For it was not quite so easy as it looked to say offhand what Miss Peggy should do in these circumstances. Of course, the natural man was moved to answer at once, "Oh, tell that young cub in New York to go to the mischief, and ten miles further!" But

there were considerations. The wishes of two families were not lightly to be thrown aside. The cub might not be so much of a cub, after all; on the contrary, he might be a perfectly honest, sober, industrious member of society, with feelings just like another, but perhaps with no great faculty of expressing them in correspondence. But the chief reason for doubt was this: When a young woman asks for advice, she knows quite well what advice she hopes for; and, as a rule, she is inordinately skilful in angling for it. Little difficulty has she in getting up a presentable tale. And how could one accept Miss Peggy's facts as being all the facts? For one thing, it seemed hardly believable or possible that our peerless Peggy should be in any risk of being "thrown over". We, who had known her for some time, and seen her in various circles in London, had got into a way of asking ourselves: "Well, now, to whom is Peggy going to fling the handkerchief, after all?" And to think that in New York, or Brooklyn, or some such place across the water, there was a young man who, instead of thanking Heaven a hundred times a day for his great good fortune, was rather inclined to hang off, and hesitate, and postpone, with visions of dollars, and yachts, and newspaper paragraphs more nearly occupying his mind—this was hardly conceivable. When lovers quarrel, they are capable of saying anything of each other. Perhaps Miss Peggy was temporarily indignant because of the coolness of those letters, or the infrequency of them? One seemed to want to know more; or to take refuge in silence. For here was apparently a settlement of her life—approved by both the families immediately concerned—which was not to be regardlessly shattered, without very definite cause shown.

As it happened, no further opportunity was afforded Miss Peggy of reopening this delicate subject during our brief exploration of the antiquities and curiosities of Bath; and in due course of time we had finished our peregrination, and were driving in a couple of cabs, to that point of the Kennet and Avon Canal where, as we understood, the Nameless Barge was now awaiting us. And very different, indeed, was the manner

of our leaving from the manner of our arrival. Just as we reached the banks of the canal, the heavy rain ceased, and a burst of warm sunlight filled all the air; while we had hardly set forth before we found ourselves in an enchanted garden of overhanging foliage. Here was no squalor of slums; but a wilderness of rain-washed leaves flashing million upon million of white diamonds; the yellow tassels of the laburnum, the rose-red clusters of the hawthorn, the milky minarets of the chestnut all aglow in the light. And then, by-and-by, when we had stolen through these closed and guarded paradises, behold! a great valley lay far beneath us; and, beyond, a range of wooded heights with the suburbs of Bath stretching out, terrace on terrace, into the open country. This Kennet and Avon Canal, winding snake-like along the side of the hill, gave us wider and wider views as we glided onwards; the last traces of the city began to disappear; far below us the Avon gleamed a thread of silver between its alders and its willows; the heights beyond rose into a series of receding woods along the high horizon line. And then the blessed warmth of the sunlight! Our waterproofs were flung along the roof of the house, to bask and dry there. A sense of freedom and lightness and movement prevailed. We felt as if we had come out of some cribbed and cabined place—a dark and depressing and liquid place—into a wider world of comfort and sweetness and pleasant sights and sounds. The gracious air about us was laden with subtle scents. The birds were singing. We were glad to have done with the last of the towns.

And ever the beautiful valley increased in loveliness and loneliness as we followed the slow windings of our galleried water-way, high up on this hill-side. We had all this world of sunlight and green leaves and sweet-blowing winds entirely to ourselves. We met with no one. Miss Peggy was up at the bow, her throat bare to the warm breeze, her hair, unshielded by any bonnet, showing threads of burnished gold in the sunlight. Jack Duncombe was standing beside her, with an Ordnance map spread out on the roof of the house. Perhaps she was listening to him; but now and again she looked along

to the steersman, in a puzzled and curious way. She seemed to say: "Well, have you considered yet? What would the general voice say I was justified in doing? And when will there be a chance for you to let me know?" Colonel Cameron was talking to Queen Tita about what he should do if he settled down in the West Highlands; amongst other things, he seemed to have some notion of getting one or two young seals and training them to hunt salmon for him. The Horse-Marine was sitting sideways on his horse, and contentedly smoking. Captain Columbus had thrown aside his coat, because of the hot sun, and was marching along a great way ahead. Murdoch was within, no doubt putting our toy-house to rights.

Then we came to the Dundas Aqueduct, which spans the wide vale; and here the spacious view was more extensive than ever—the landscape disappearing into tender distances of rose-grey and lightest green, until, at the far horizon line, and melting into the silvery sky, there were touches of pale, translucent blue. But this aqueduct carried us across the valley—to the slopes of Knowl Hill, in fact; and very soon we had left the wide, open country behind us, and were plunged into umbrageous woods. It was much hotter here; there was hardly a breath of air to stir the shelving branches that felt their way out into the sunlight; and it was but rarely that the intervening foliage afforded any shelter. Nevertheless, these good people would insist on going for a stroll along the tow-path—all except Miss Peggy, who, at the last moment, abruptly changed her mind, and decided to remain with the steersman, to cheer him with her company.

"This might be a river in a Brazilian forest," she said, "for the beauty of it, and the solitude."

It was not of any river in Brazil she was thinking; she was but waiting until those people on the bank were out of earshot.

Then she said presently—

"Have you thought that over?"

"Yes."

Her next question was not put into words; it was a nervous

flash of inquiry that appeared in her eyes. Then she looked down again, as if awaiting judgment. She had a bit of red hawthorn in her hand; and her fingers were pulling into small shreds one or two of the dark green leaves.

"Well, you see, Miss Peggy, if your description of the situation is literally correct—literally and absolutely correct—then you would be amply justified in telling that young gentleman in New York to go and be hanged. That is what any man would say offhand, and at once. But there may be little qualifying things. It isn't any temporary estrangement, is it, that may be made up? Your pride may have been wounded; are you sure you don't exaggerate his indifference? You have heard of lovers' quarrels ——"

Miss Peggy tossed her head slightly—the movement was scarcely perceptible.

"— and people who intervene in these with any kind of advice generally get a bang on the head for their pains—subsequently, that is, when the lovers have made it up."

"Lovers!" said she.

"Besides, where is the harm of allowing this engagement, or understanding, or whatever it is, to drift on as it is doing? There may be some explanation. Letters may have been delayed. You may get them when you go back to London."

"And if there were a hundred letters, do you think I don't know what would be in them?" she demanded, rather proudly. "And as for drifting and drifting, I have grown a little tired of that. It is no great compliment to a girl to put her in such a position. I dare say, now, if I were over in America—if I were to go over to America for even a fortnight, I could get the whole matter settled ——"

"You really and honestly mean that you want to have it broken off?"

"Broken off!" she exclaimed, with just a touch of indignation in her voice. "It is he who wants to have it broken off—and hasn't the courage to say so. He won't own it to me; he won't own it to his family; but do you think I don't understand? I am not blind. And however stupid a woman may

be at other times, in an affair of this kind she can see clearly enough."

"That is true. But, on the other hand, if you think that this half-and-half engagement should come to an end, why not let it gradually die a natural death? It seems pretty moribund at present, doesn't it? Cease writing to him ——"

"He hasn't written to me for nearly two months!"

"Very well. Stop altogether. If that doesn't force him to ask for an explanation—if he asks for no explanation—then the matter is at an end. You go your way; and he his."

"I—I suppose that is good advice; and I thank you," she said, in rather a low voice.

But what followed was most amazing. She stood silent for a second or so; then she turned away a little; and one could see that she had taken out her handkerchief quickly, and was furtively wiping away the tears from her eyes. This was a strange and bewildering spectacle. It was all so unlike our gay and audacious Peggy. And one naturally and instantly jumped to the conclusion that there was a good deal more to reveal.

"I say, Miss Peggy, I am afraid you haven't told me that story straight. You care for him all the same; is that it?"

"N—no!" she said, still with averted face.

"Then there is someone else?"

She turned with a quick look—half-frightened, as it were; then her eyes were downcast. She said nothing; but there was a telltale flush in her cheek as rosy-red as was the bit of hawthorn she held in her hand.

"Oh, there is someone else, then? But why didn't you say so before? For that makes a very great difference—that makes all the difference in the world! There's someone else? Then you've found yourself fettered; and vexed by the uncertainty; and perhaps to tell you that you should merely let that nebulous engagement disappear of itself wasn't very comforting ——"

Miss Peggy had dried her eyes.

"I am away from my own people," she said, in the same low voice, "and perhaps I have been a little anxious and fretting—

and even miserable at times; but I am sorry I gave you any trouble about it. I suppose what you say is right."

"But wait a moment. I tell you that this makes all the difference. Of course, I assume that you are quite certain of what you say about that young man in New York—that you know he wouldn't be sorry to have the engagement broken off, but would rather you would say the word?"

"Who is likely to know if not myself?" she answered. "I have told you the truth."

"He would rather you would say the word? Then say the word! You ask for my advice—there it is. Tell him he may go to Jericho—or Jaffa, or Jerusalem, whichever he likes; and at the earliest convenient opportunity. Make yourself free at once. Justified?—of course you will be justified. No man has a right to keep a woman in any such position; no woman ought to marry a sneak. No; I told you you might let that unwelcome understanding die of neglect and inanition, because I thought there was no reason for anything else; now I tell you you should shake off those fetters at once, as soon as a letter can cross the Atlantic."

"Ah," said she, rather wistfully, "if only your wife would say as much!"

"She will say precisely the same."

Miss Peggy shook her head.

"No; it's too much to hope for. Men are more considerate to women—more forgiving—they make allowances. I should be afraid to speak to her about it."

"You needn't be afraid. Haven't you discovered yet that she likes you a little? She can suffer you, as the Tyrolese lover says to his sweetheart. And if you go the right way to work, I know what she will do for you—she will write over to your people in New York, and give them a most fascinating description of the favoured person—that is, if she knows him."

"Oh, but she does!" Miss Peggy cried; and then instantly she drew back, in wild alarm: "Oh, I—I mean—she has always been so kind to me—do you think she would do that?"

"She will do it if you go the right way about it. She very

much likes you to stroke her hair smooth. You might get a little nosegay of wild-flowers and pin them at her neck. Then, if you are by yourselves, you can sit down beside her, and put your arm within hers, and tell her the whole story ——"

"Oh, do you think she would do that for me?" cried Peggy again—and there was a far happier light shining in her face than had been there a few minutes before.

"Of course she will! Why, you poor, weak, timid, fluttering, solitary thing—wandering all about the world alone and friendless ——"

"No; not friendless," she said—with a very pleasant modest look in her eyes. "Not friendless. I think I have fallen among very good friends—better than I deserve. But I am not ungrateful, anyway."

Then a thought seemed to strike her.

"You must be tired standing there all this time, with your foot on the tiller," said this good-natured lass, rather timidly. "Won't you let me take it?"

"Oh, no, thank you."

"And I haven't said a single word of—of gratitude—to you."

"You needn't."

"And then," said she, rather incoherently—and the clouds were all away from her forehead now, and her eyes were bright and clear with glad anticipation—"in the summer—later on in the summer—I can see such a happy party of us altogether—you know I've never been ——"

She suddenly stopped. The smooth-gliding boat had carried us along until we had unexpectedly overtaken the pedestrians, who were standing on the bank: they were coming on board now, for it was near lunch-time. And for all the trouble we were at in stopping and taking them on with us, they rewarded us—at least Queen Tita did—with a number of feeble japes about the study of English history, all of which harmlessly glided off the triple brass of conscious innocence. Was it English history, then, that had brought this light into Peggy's face? She seemed very pleased about something; and modestly grateful; and unusually affectionate even towards this taunting fiend.

She held her fingers in hers; and talked to her in a low voice —about nothing in particular; and her eyes were fixed on the smaller woman, so that, very soon—before their mild, clear rays, and the shining honesty of them, and perhaps, also, a little touch of girlish appeal—all that sham sarcasm slunk away abashed. These two went into the saloon hand in hand.

We were now come near to Bradford, which is a clean little grey town cheerfully situated on the side of a hill, amid a profusion of foliage; and here we stopped to bait the horse; while Murdoch attended to our modest wants within. And whether it was the grateful coolness of the saloon—the summer air entering by the open windows and stirring the flowers on the table—or whether we were glad to be away from cities, and altogether by ourselves again in these still solitudes—or whether there was something peculiarly attractive and winning about Miss Peggy's demeanour towards us all—certain it is that at this little banquet there prevailed much content. She was so very friendly, in a gentle sort of fashion, with everyone; but in especial we could perceive that she wished to be very kind and considerate towards Mr. Duncombe. There were no longer hypocritical appeals to him for aphorisms. His sensations on becoming a reviewer were no longer a subject for mocking inquiry. Nay, on the contrary, she was quite serious, and respectful, and almost anxious, as she hoped that he was now seeing his way clear to the beginning of his work.

"Oh, I'm in no hurry," said he, lightly. "I've had a general look through the books; and what I'm going to say about them must grow up of itself, bit by bit. I don't think I have done anything this morning—except compose an epitaph ——"

"An epitaph, Mr. Duncombe?" Queen Tita cried.

"Yes; I'll read it to you," said he. He took out his note-book. "It's for a tombstone in a village churchyard:

It was a nasty cold I caught;
And little of that cold I thought;
To lie abed I soon was brought;
And here I am reduced to naught.

You see," he continued, with much equanimity, "epitaphs should teach something. They should point a moral. They are the only kind of poetry that comes constantly before the rustic eye. And what better can you do with a dead and buried Hodge than make him a solemn warning to the whole countryside? I can imagine a heap of good being done in that way. Take drink, now: a tombstone would appeal to the conscience of the community more effectively than any sermon. Couldn't we manage something? Let me see."

He took out a pencil, and began scribbling a few words.

"How's this?—

'Twas ale that robbed me of my ease;
'Twas ale that twisted up my knees;
'Twas ale that swelled the doctor's fees;
And choked my breath; and here I be's.

I don't know that that is quite as good as the other; but it's the moral—it's the public warning—that is the valuable thing ——"

"Mr. Duncombe," said Queen Tita, "I don't know how you can be thinking about epitaphs on a day like this. I suppose it was Bath Abbey Church put them in your head. But just look out of that window—everything seems just full of light and colour—look!"

And indeed the open window framed a very pretty picture—of summer foliage all shimmering in the sunshine, and of water struck into a silver ripple here and there by the velvet-fingered wind. He put away his notebook without more ado, and agreed with her that it was not a day for the construction of epitaphs. He was a very biddable youth; and he had no kind of literary vanity to be wounded. He helped himself again—and freely—to the salad that Colonel Cameron had mixed for us; and declared that it somehow reminded him of sweetbriar, and wild roses, and June. Or was it that a distinct feeling of June was perceptible in the sweet air blowing in at the window? We were getting near to June now.

We were now about to enter Crabbe's country—or rather, *the* country in which he spent the latter years of his life; for,

as we drew away from Bradford, we passed within a mile or so of Trowbridge; thereafter striking north by Hilperton and Staverton. And a more delightful afternoon never shone over this smiling landscape. We were no longer enveloped in woods; we were more in the open; and there was a light breeze blowing, just enough to temper the heat. But then, again, the wind rarely struck down upon the sheltered waters of the river-like canal; so that the glassy surface mirrored the golden-green masses of the elms that overhung the banks, and showed, besides, here and there, a glimmer of silver and blue. As the evening drew on, the breeze ceased altogether; the cloudless sky was still and serene; a warmer light streamed along those peaceful meadows, where the cattle were grazing. But for the noisy cawing of some rooks, and the occasional flute-note of a cuckoo in some distant grove, the silence was absolute; the smaller birds seemed to know that the golden day was dying, and had ceased to twitter in the hedges.

Meanwhile, those people who had been making their way along the bank had been occupying themselves in various fashions, and in various combinations, too, as chance or fancy dictated. And when they came on board again—as we were drawing near to Seend—it soon became quite apparent that Queen Tita had had some piece of news imparted to her during the long ramble ashore. Not that any word was spoken. Oh, dear, no. A young lady's secret is a sacred thing. But though she tried to look as grave as an owl, it was plain that she was just a little bit excited; and pleased, also; and inclined to look on Peggy with eyes at once puzzled and affectionate and approving. But what had become of Jack Duncombe?

"Oh," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit (who apparently had been bewildered into forgetfulness), "I was to tell you. There are several locks ahead; and when we get through these, it will be time to stop for the night, he says. And he has gone away to find out some railway-station, to see if he can telegraph to Devizes. He has some friends living near Devizes, he says; and we shall be passing through there to-morrow."

And then blank horror fell upon the steersman of this boat.

What might not that awful Court do to us? The tipstaff is a terrible person; Holloway Gaol a fearful destination. But in the meantime we had to encounter these pernicious locks; and the hard work drove speculation out of the brain.

So we laboriously fought our way to the end of them; and then went along some distance; until, having discovered a quiet and sheltered nook, where there were wide overbranching willows, we ran the boat in there—the Nameless Barge forming a very comfortable little nest in among the leaves. By this time Jack Duncombe had come back; and with news that was welcome to one person on board. If he had really meant to defy the Vice-Chancellor's authority by communicating with the Wiltshire young lady, his felonious purpose had been baffled. He had discovered some little country station—Seend station he said it was—but they could not help him. Either there was no telegraph; or it was too late; or they could not receive private messages.

That was a gracious night, in this unnamed and unknown solitude. We were entirely alone; for we had allowed Murdoch to go off to supper with Columbus and the Horse-Marine in the village; and it was left to the women-folk to clear the dinner-table for themselves. Then (for they were not antagonistic to tobacco) they came out and made themselves snug in the stern-sheets of the boat; and Miss Peggy had her banjo; and the silence around seemed to wait. There should have been moonlight; but the times and seasons were against us. Nay, we could see but few of the stars in the clear heavens overhead; for the willow-branches were thick: moreover, the red glow streaming out from the windows on the stems and leaves rather attracted the eyes. And you may be sure it was not "Tennessee" that Peggy sang for us on this still summer night.

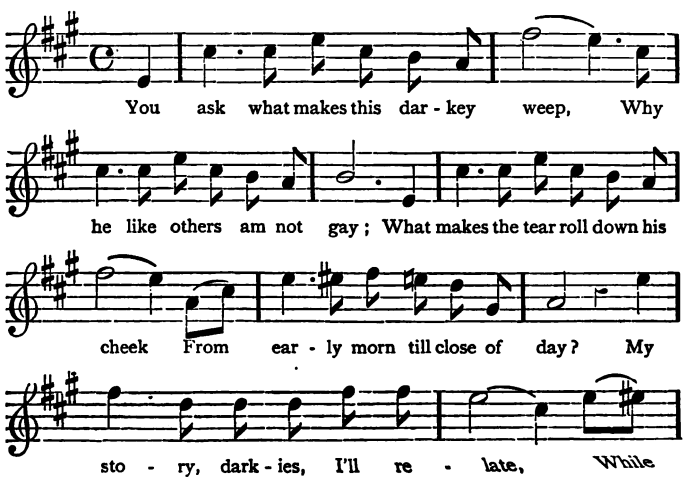
No; she began—

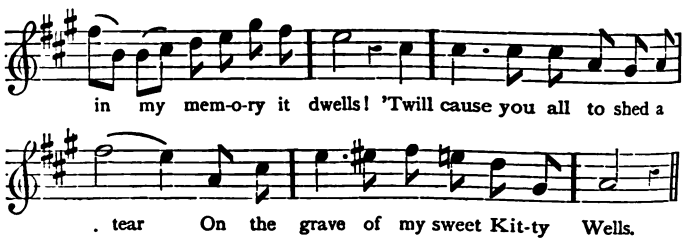
> "Once in the dear, dead days beyond recal,
> When on the world the mist began to fall,
> Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
> Low to our hearts Love sang an old sweet song"—

and we could see, by the dim glow coming from the door of

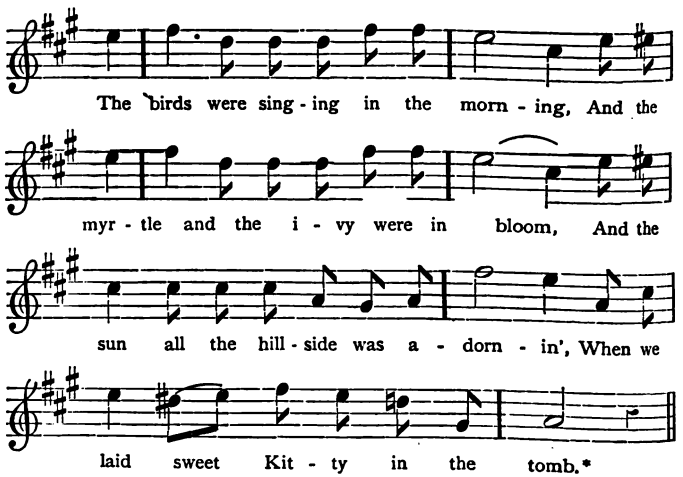
the saloon, that Mrs. Threepenny-bit had drawn as close to the girl as the banjo would permit, and that she had placed a hand lightly and kindly on her shoulder. And what do you think was Miss Peggy's next selection? Well, she was aware that a certain song of hers was a particular favourite with one of the persons now listening to her; and she was a grateful lass; and she may have been thinking that she had wished to say some word of thanks for the rough-and-ready advice addressed to her that morning. Here were her thanks, then—or, at least, some timid effort to please? For we had grown to have some notion of the inner workings of the mind of this Person without a Character.

The ballad of "Kitty Wells" is not of an intellectual cast, any more than are most of the plantation songs; but the air is pretty and attractive; and this American young lady, to the soft ripple of her banjo, could sing it very sweetly indeed. It seemed to suit her voice somehow; you forgot the nigger fatuities when you heard her tremulous contralto notes; especially when, as on this still night, she sang in a simple and subdued fashion, without effort of any kind. This was what the listening silence and the darkness heard:





And still more gently she sang the chorus: in the hush of the willow-leaves all around us her rich, clear voice was just audible, and no more.



Miss Peggy was exceedingly amiable this evening; and would sing whatever was asked of her—one thing after another;

* The melody as here given Miss Peggy herself was so obliging as to jot down for us; but she seems to have pitched on a rather high key. Or is this banjo notation? an ignorant person is fain to ask. We never could hear who the composer was—though some inquiries have been made, both in England and America; but if this should meet his eye—in whatsoever far land he may be—he is entreated to accept our profound apologies for the theft.

until Sir Ewen Cameron interposed (with some brief exhibition of military authority that was entirely uncalled for), and would have no more of such persecution and cruelty. Sir Ewen suggested, instead, an adjournment to the saloon, and a game of cards; but it appeared that the women-folk were bent on retiring early; and so, after they had gone inside, and partaken of a little soda-water, and the like, they were allowed to depart. Who knows what portentous secrets they might not have to discuss in the safe seclusion of the ladies' cabin?

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Do you ask what the birds say? The Sparrow, the Dove,
The Linnet and Thrush, say 'I love, and I love!'
In the winter they're silent—the wind is so strong,
What it says I don't know, but it sings a loud song,
But green leaves, and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing, and loving—all come back together!"

YES, they were all at it again—the linnet and robin; the mavis and merle; the cuckoo telling us of his whereabouts in the heart of the thicket; the larks filling all the wide spaces of the sky with their silver song. But for this universal twittering, and clear carolling, and fluttering of wings, the world was still enough and silent enough. The red kine hardly moved in the meadows golden with buttercups. The olive-green masses of the elms, rising far into the pale blue of the heavens, did not stir a leaf. The warm sunlight seemed to draw forth a hundred scents from herbs and flowers, that hung in the motionless air. And as if all those glowing colours of bush and tree and blossom were not in themselves enough, we had them repeated on the mirror-like surface of the canal—an inverted fairy-land, with the various hues and tints mysteriously softened and blended together.

As one is idly gazing at all these things, and speculating as to how far a certain white butterfly, that has started early on his travels, will wander before the heat of noon causes him to close his wings on a head of clover, there is a quiet stirring of the willow-branches, and then a footfall on the gangboard connecting the boat with the shore. Turning forthwith, one finds that it is Miss Peggy who has come down through those yellowed meadows, and it is Sir Ewen Cameron who is steadying the plank for her. She has been abroad thus early to gather flowers for the breakfast-table, she says; and in each hand she

has a great cluster of buttercups. As for the June roses in her cheeks, where did she get them on so extremely still a morning? And as for the speedwell blue of her eyes —— But she passes hastily into the saloon, for the flower glasses have to be filled.

Then this long, sandy-haired Highland officer: has he anything to say? He observes that the morning is beautiful—which is no secret. He thinks he saw a trout rise a little bit further along. Presently he puts this question—

"Shall you have any need of Murdoch's services this autumn?"

"I fear not."

"He is an exceedingly handy fellow—don't you think so?"

"I do."

"And very willing, isn't he?"

"He is."

"Well, now, don't you consider that a young fellow like that would be better in a settled situation than in doing odd jobs about Tobermory, with an occasional month or two's yachting in the summer?"

"I dare say he would, if it was anything of a situation."

"Do you think he would come to me at Inverfask?"

"Inverfask?"

"Yes. I would give him a fair wage; he would have employment all the year round; and he might look forward to some increase of pay if he deserved it."

"A permanent place at Inverfask—is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you put that offer before him, Murdoch will be a proud lad."

"And you are sure you don't want him this autumn?"

"Almost certain—besides, that could not be allowed to interfere."

"I will go and ask him at once," said he; and he, too, disappeared into the saloon.

Well, now, the Nameless Barge seemed to be just filled with secrets and mysteries on this busy morning; but of course one had no time to pay heed to such trumpery things; for we had

to make an early start in order to get through the chain of locks outside Devizes. Alas! when we came in sight of these, our hearts fell. We had not the courage to attack that appalling ascent. Why, from the far top of the hill right down here to the plain stretched a long, brown, ribbed thing like the under jaw of some mighty saurian monster, its jagged teeth waiting to devour us. It was a hideous object in the midst of this smiling and sun-warmed landscape. Anything in reason we could attempt; but not this; even Jack Duncombe succumbed.

"No," he said, "there's nothing in the shape of dogged obstinacy about me. If I have to give in, I give in. I'm of the mind of your countryman, Miss Rosslyn, who was asked why he looked rather depressed. 'Well,' said he, 'my store's been burnt down, and I've lost every cent I had in the world. My wife was in the store; she was burned to death. All my children perished in the fire, too. So now I think I've had enough—I ain't a hog.' If you could get to heaven by climbing up that Jacob's ladder, it might be worth while trying; but it isn't heaven that's at the top—it's only Devizes. So I propose we leave Murdoch, and Columbus, and the Horse-Marine to fight it out amongst them—there's Columbus with his coat off already—and we can walk on to the town, and get letters posted, and telegrams sent off."

Telegrams? Was he still bent on that mad freak? In any case, it was safer to have no cognisance of it; he might do what he pleased; no questions should be asked. Indeed, they were all of them welcome to such twopenny-halfpenny secrets as they chose to cherish. Here was a brilliant and beautiful morning; the ascent of the long hill (when we had ignominously left the boat to its fate) revealed an ever-extending view over a richly-wooden plain; the air was sweet; the trout were rising briskly in the reservoirs attached to the locks; and the matted masses of the water-buttercup were a blaze of white blossoms. The huge saurian jaw was disregarded. Miss Peggy, head in air, and marching proudly along, was repeating to herself:

> "Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,
> He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day's dawing,"

which she had got nearly perfect now. Colonel Cameron was apologising to Mrs. Threepenny-bit for having carried off her faithful Ganymede, to serve at Inverfask House. Jack Duncombe was eagerly surveying that wide plain: might not two young ladies be early abroad on so pleasant a morning—driving a smart little pony-chaise along the leafy lanes?

If there is any deader town than Devizes, in this country or any other, the present writer has no acquaintance with it. The very width of the central thoroughfare—filled as it was on this morning with a pale white sunlight—gives a sense of solitariness and loneliness. What bold man would cross that wide and empty street, drawing upon himself the eyes of the unseen community?—would he not rather slink round by the church, and gain the opposite pavement unobserved? When we called in at the small post-office, the people seemed quite startled by this apparition of visitors. And when we went for a ramble through the silent town—glancing into the unfrequented shops and the lifeless-looking little parlour-windows, it was to think of the placid, apathetic, unvarying lives led by these good folk as a very strange sort of thing. In one of the shops—devoted to the sale of apples and confections, apparently—a young girl was sitting behind the counter, reading what appeared to be some kind of cheap journal of fiction. There was no one else in the place; it looked as if no one else ever had been there, or was expected; and, as we passed, the girl happened to raise her head from the periodical she held in her hands. Her eyes looked a trifle beglamoured and unobservant.

"And you fancy, now," said Jack Duncombe to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who has been making remarks, "that that girl leads a very lonely life—in that little bit of a shop—in this empty town? Why, I will wager that she is at this moment back again into the most gay and brilliant of fashionable society, listening to the most beautiful language, in gorgeous and gilded saloons. She isn't in Devizes at all; she is moving through splendid palaces; and breathlessly watching how her particular friends are getting on—and not one of them less than a Marquis. '*My Lord, in your Lordship*'s honour to-night the

fountains shall spout naught but perfume; and a thousand wax candles shall shed their brilliancy o'er the banquet.' 'Lit up by a spark from your Ladyship's beaming eyes,' responded the chivalrous nobleman, bowing low. In the society that that lonely shop-girl enjoys—that she revels in from morning to night—lords and ladies converse like lords and ladies; and Duchesses know what is expected of them. I never had but one conversation with a Duchess; and she talked all the time about her sciatic nerve, and what the *massage* treatment was doing for her."

He was pretending to be very much at his ease, as we wandered along through the little town, chatting aimlessly the while; but all the same he would from time to time direct a swift backward glance along the wide empty thoroughfare. Was there still a chance, then, that a certain pony-chaise might suddenly appear in sight? One almost began to share in his secret anticipation. It would be rather nice if Maud and her sister were to come back with us to the boat for luncheon. Young ladies of somewhat robust nerve, one had gathered. Perhaps with coal-black eyes, and country cheeks, and rippling laughter. The divinity that doth hedge a ward of Court would hardly be visible in the snug seclusion of the saloon; and if anything came of it—if that pestilent Vice-Chancellor should grow fractious and perverse, could we not go before him and swear it was all the result of an accident, seeing there had been no chance of sending off any telegram from Seend? But the great white sunlit thoroughfare remained as empty as ever. A cat slunk along by the church railings—there was no other sign of life. And so—wistfully giving up all hope of encountering the blushing Maud and her jovial sister—we slowly toiled away up the hill again, to see if Columbus and his mates had successfully vanquished the saurian monster.

Now perhaps it was that some school had been set free; but at all events when the Nameless Barge drew near the outskirts of the little town, her appearance was hailed with delight by a considerable concourse of small girls and boys; and these

interesting brats were speedily engaged in summoning their elder relatives; so that, by the time the boat had reached the bridge, it was being regarded by a population greater than any we had supposed Devizes to possess. To escape from the curiosity of these cottagers did not at first sight seem an easy matter, until we espied a yard fenced on three sides by a tall paling, and coming down on the water's edge; accordingly, we shoved the boat along to this place of shelter, and made her fast, defeating the following crowd. Columbus and the Horse-Marine went away to get their dinner, which they had stoutly earned; and Murdoch came on board to set forth some bit of lunch for us. Jack Duncombe seemed somewhat depressed. No doubt it was tantalising to know that those young ladies were so near, and that presently we should be moving away. As for Holloway Gaol, and its limited interviews, and its lights out at such and such an hour, he probably did not think of all that.

At lunch we were listening to a far from fiery controversy between Miss Rosslyn and Colonel Cameron as to the respective merits of Monarchical and Republican forms of government, when something occurred to withdraw our attention from that by no means engrossing subject.

"You see," the tall soldier was saying, in his quiet, persuasive fashion—and she was an apt and attentive scholar rather than a fierce disputant—"you must remember that now-a-days kings are not self-created. A king reigns not because he chooses to govern a people, but because the people choose to be governed by him. The queen-bee does not coerce the hive; the hive agree to respect and guard the queen-bee. And even in the old days tyrants and tyrannies had their uses. They aroused antagonism, heroism, patriotism. Italy, when she had to fight the Austrian, became splendid; now she's nothing. When a nation has got all the freedom it wants, it takes to making money; and that is the basest—the most degrading—of occupations ——"

Thus he was going on when a very singular object became visible outside. The smaller windows of the saloon were just

about level with the bank; and, indeed, the nettles, daisies, and dandelions growing there almost touched the panes. It was startling, therefore, to discover, among these weeds, a large pair of hobnailed boots. At first, we could not imagine how they came to be there, and to be so remarkably close to us; but presently we perceived that above each boot there was a strip of corduroy. And then it dawned upon us that here were the lower portions of a human being—a foundation, as it were, on which the fancy could build up any kind of superstructure it chose. *Ex pede Herculem.* The boots were large, not to say huge. Was this, then, some young giant who had scrambled over the tall paling? Or perhaps the owner of the boatyard, who had come in by the legitimate gate, and was now staring at the strange craft that had invaded his premises? Jack Duncombe solved the problem. He went outside and addressed the inquisitive stranger. We heard him talking, coaxing, expostulating; then, as these invitations were of no avail, he would appear to have stepped ashore, and gripped the newcomer by the scruff of the neck: the next moment we beheld him at the door of the saloon—a shock-headed boy of ten or twelve, whose stolid bovine gaze seemed to have no curiosity in it—only a blank wonder. He was asked if he had seen any boat like this before, but vouchsafed no reply. Mechanically he accepted a lump of cake that Mrs. Threepenny-bit cut for him; but there was no word of thanks.

"Boy," said Jack Duncombe to him, solemnly, "that is cake. And you have a mouth. Or are you afraid? Is it possible that you have discovered the fallacy of the proverb that you mayn't eat your cake and have it too? Have you eaten your cake and been only too painfully aware that you had it, and were likely to have it?"

The boy looked at him—and looked. Then he looked at the saloon—at the table—at us—and gazed. Finally, as there was nothing to be done with him, Jack Duncombe, figuratively speaking, threw him ashore again; and got ready to pole the boat across to the tow-path, where Captain Columbus was now waiting.

After leaving Devizes, there are fifteen miles of plain sailing without the interruption of a single lock; so that we made good progress this afternoon. The canal, which is here so little used that it abounds with all kinds of water-plants—the white buttercup conspicuous amongst them—winds along a high plateau which affords extensive views over the neighbouring landscape. Not that we saw this somewhat lonely stretch of country under the most favourable conditions. As we stole along by Bishops Cannings and All Cannings and Stanton Fitzwarren the still air seemed to be threatening thunder; the skies were of a cloudy milky-white; and the hills that rose to the horizon-line both on north and south—Roughbridge Hill, Easton Hill, St. Ann's Hill, Etchilhampton Hill, Wivelsford Hill, and the like—were slowly deepening in gloom. Then came rain; and forthwith these idle people fled into the saloon, to books, and writing, and tea, and what not. All but the faithful Peggy, that is to say. Miss Peggy not only went and fetched the steersman his waterproof, but she also brought out her own; and having drawn the hood over her pretty brown hair, and fastened it securely under her chin, she took up her position on the steering thwart. Was she still anxious, then, to show her gratitude, in some vague tentative way? At all events her companionship on this sombre afternoon was sufficiently welcome.

But one soon began to discover what had brought Miss Peggy out into the rain; her remarks about the weather were speedily over.

"Has Colonel Cameron," she asks presently, with a very becoming hesitation, and with downcast eyes—"has Colonel Cameron said anything—anything particular—to you?"

"Nothing very particular."

"No, I suppose not," she continues, with the same pretty hesitation. "I had to ask him not to say anything—because—because I don't wish Mr. Duncombe to know. But you ought to know. Yes, you ought to know ——"

"Do you think I don't know?"

"What?"

"And this is the way they keep a young lady's secret!—making it as plain as the nose on a man's face or a weather-cock on a steeple. And you are especially anxious to conceal it from Jack Duncombe, are you? Don't you think it possible Mr. Duncombe may have his own little affairs to attend to? Well, well, you've done it at last, I suppose; and it's very little you know of the fate you are rushing upon—you poor, fluttering, timid, solitary creature. Banishment to the regions of perpetual ice—that is a pretty future for you. Think of the gales howling down from the North Sea—the glens blocked up with snow—no communication with the rest of the world—the rivers and lakes hard frozen—hail changing to sleet, and sleet changing to hail—a Polar bear prowling round the crofts—a walrus ——"

"And a carpenter—you mustn't forget the carpenter," says this young lady, who isn't as easily frightened as you might imagine.

"The roads impassable—no letters or newspapers for a month at a stretch—if you want to go out of the house you'll have to get a path cut through the snow —— And what will poor Peggy do then, poor thing?"

"Poor Peggy will wrap herself up in her great big ulster," she answers, placidly. "Yes. Your wife is going to write to the island of Harris for a web of homespun cloth for me; and I'm going to have heaps of things made of it—an ulster, to begin with. But it isn't so very dreadful in the Highlands, is it?"

"Dreadful in the Highlands, you simple innocent! Why, don't you know that that blessed land has hot water laid on, winter and summer? There never was a country so carefully provided for. The Gulf of Mexico is the pot they boil the water in; and then it is taken all the way across the Atlantic, and poured along those happy shores. So you needn't wonder that they have camellias growing in the open air; and tree-fuchsias covering the fronts of houses; and bats flying about in January ——"

Now, this was to her a most interesting subject; and we were far from blessing Jack Duncombe when he came bustling

out with his discovery that there was a great white horse cut on the side of a hill we were then passing—about Alton Priors. We cared not a jot about that big, long-necked, ill-shapen creature that looked more like a camelopard than anything else. We knew not what it meant; and were not inclined to ask. Besides, the country about here is of a commonplace character—hardly worth regarding. Moreover, we had seen horses cut upon hillsides elsewhere. And again, we had private matters to talk over. But the distraction served to draw attention to the fact that the rain had ceased; so waterproofs were forthwith thrown aside; and we were glad to welcome a few pale touches of yellow among those louring clouds.

However, the evening never really cleared; indeed, twilight came over prematurely; and so, when we got to New Mill Bridge, we made up our minds to remain there for the night. There must have been some hamlet in the neighbourhood; for two or three small children came along through the fields to stare at this strange thing all afire in the dusk; but presently they, too—as well as Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine —had disappeared; and we were left to shut ourselves in from the now darkening world.

That evening, amid our various occupations and diversions (it is to be hoped that the sensitive ears of the night were not too much shocked; but this small company seemed mirthfully inclined, for some occult reason or another), a good deal was said about Savernake Forest; and we hoped we should have a good day on the morrow for a glimpse of the only one of the ancient forests of England that does not belong to the Crown. But it was very little of Savernake Forest we were fated to see —it was nothing at all, in short. When we got away the next morning, we found that the canal still continued at this high level; but that the hills and terraces fringing the forest were still higher; so that all that met the eye were some green slopes and banks, a profusion of hawthorn bushes covered with bloom, and some hedges white with cow-parsley. However, after we had made our way through a tunnel (a train rattled by overhead when we were inside, and there was a rolling rever-

beration as of thunder) and got along a bit further, the landscape once more opened out around us—rising at the horizon into far ridges of low-lying hill, mostly crowned with wood. It was not a brilliant specimen of a June day; there was still a sullen look about the sky, and a heavy feeling in the air; none the less, we had never before heard the larks so busy—the whole wide world seemed filled with their singing.

Now, what happened to us during that day must, for various reasons, be chronicled briefly and with discretion. We entertained two visitors, who were curious to see what the Nameless Barge was like. When they had dismissed the dog-cart by which they had managed to overtake us, they were easily persuaded to stay to luncheon; and Queen Tita was very gracious to them. After luncheon, they had a mind to see how the saloon appeared at night (having heard something of our mild revelries); and so all the red blinds were drawn, and the lamps and candles lit, making a pretty show. Then we went outside, but they were of an enterprising disposition, these two; and asked why, instead of standing at the bow, or sitting in the stern-sheets, we did not take up our quarters on the roof—thereby securing a wider view? Well, that was a command; forthwith Inverfask and Murdoch (Jack Duncombe spoke no word to these young ladies, and apparently remained unaware of their existence) had between them haled forth a sufficiency of rugs and cushions (Utrecht velvet); and these being placed along the house roof, the whole party of voyagers clambered up thither, and took their places, in more or less of an Eastern fashion, as it pleased them. Unfortunately this experiment was very nearly ending in a catastrophe. The Nameless Barge had never been so top-hampered before; and at one point—whether the rope caught on a stump, or whether there was some sudden bend—we found her quietly heeling over; and if Murdoch who was steering, had not jumped to the opposite side, and put all his weight on the rail, the whole of us must certainly have been deposited in the water. The young ladies shrieked—and were vastly amused at the same time. We parted with them at Hungerford, walking up to the station with them.

They were very grateful for the little entertainment we had been able to afford them. Jack Duncombe said no word of good-bye—no, not even when they were in the railway carriage. We returned to the boat, and continued on our way, heartily hoping to hear no more of that adventure.

This evening we moored near Kintbury, and after dinner we set forth—all of us, that is to say, except the Short-noticer, who was busy with his books—on an exploration of this straggling, picturesque little place, whose old-fashioned, gabled, and casemated houses, and ancient square-towered church looked very well in the wan, clear twilight. And as Colonel Cameron was walking in front with his hostess, Miss Peggy had a good deal to say to her companion about both these people.

"Colonel Anne is not so tall as Colonel Cameron," she observes, rather in an undertone—for they are not very far ahead—"but she is twice and three times the Jacobite he is. I do believe she would have raised a regiment for Bonnie Prince Charlie if she had lived in those days; and I know she would have gone wild about Flora Macdonald if she had been in London when Flora was released from prison. I like to hear Colonel Cameron speak of 'Miss Macdonald'; it isn't merely that it is respectful; it sounds as if the Camerons of Inverfask and the Macdonalds of Kingsburgh were neighbouring families, or related to each other, and knew each other quite well. He has a good many things that were bought at the sale at Kingsborough House; and I suppose they are all, in a kind of way, connected with Prince Charlie. I wonder what I should do with the little mirror frame that came from Fassiefern; would you put a piece of old glass in it if that could be got, or leave it as it is?"

And then, again, she says:

"What a lot I've got to do when I go back to town!—the books I must get—a History of the Highland Regiments first and foremost—a History of the Clans—I don't know what all. Your wife has promised to lend me a volume of pipe-music, though she says those marches are so difficult to play on the piano. Which are your favourites?"

"'The Barren Rocks of Aden' and 'The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar'."

"I will remember those. The 79th Regiment—isn't that the Cameron Highlanders?"

"It is."

"And the 42nd—that is the Black Watch, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And the Gordon Highlanders—they are the 92nd, aren't they?"

"They are. But why this catechism?"

"Oh, well," she says, evasively, "Sir Ewen is very anxious that your wife and I should go down to Aldershot to be shown over the camp, and of course one would not like to be quite ignorant ——"

"But do you imagine that Aldershot Camp is made up of Highland regiments?"

"I wonder," she continues (and now a window is being lit here and there in the village—the pale yellow glow of the candles projecting upon the blind the shadow of the geranium-pots ranged on the inner sill), "I wonder where he keeps his medals. I do wish you would persuade him to send for them. Couldn't he have them forwarded to Reading or to Henley? If you only knew how I am longing to see them. Well—I have been thinking—perhaps he has neglected them—for men are so careless; but your wife and I could brighten them up, and brush the cases, and make them neat and smart for him. Women can do that better than a man can."

Presently she says—

"Does he wear them when he goes to a Levée at Buckingham Palace?"

"Haven't the least idea."

"The Victoria Cross, anyway. He must wear the Victoria Cross at any State ceremony where the Queen is present, surely? Is it true that when the Queen presents the Victoria Cross to anyone, she pins it on his breast with her own hands?"

"I believe so."

"I should like to see that done," she observes, absently.

And then again—as she is regarding the tall soldier in front

of ner, who is lounging idly along, one hand behind his back, the other holding a big cigar which he has not taken the trouble to light—she laughs a little, and says—

'Just to think—that I used to be afraid of him!"

This was a long-protracted ramble; and the curiosity of our young American friend about everything relating to the Highlands and the modes of life there proved to be quite insatiable, just as it was simple, honest, and ingenuous. When we got back to the boat the dusk had come down; and all the little red windows were aglow; but Mrs. Threepenny-bit did not go on board; Colonel Cameron did; and we guessed that she had sent him to summon Mr. Duncombe away from his books.

"Your servant, Colonel!" says Miss Peggy, as we come up.

"What do you mean?" the smaller woman answers. "Have you changed services, Peggy? You've been a sailor all the way through—are you going to leave the navy for the army?"

"Yes," says Miss Peggy, lightly. "I have enlisted. And what's more—I've got my marching orders."

"Where for?"

This tall young recruit brings up the palm of her hand to her forehead, and makes a very fair imitation of a military salute.

"For Inverfask, Colonel," she says—and the night conceals the laughing shyness of her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Ye happy fields, unknown to noise and strife,
The kind rewarders of industrious life;
Ye shady woods, where once I used to rove
Alike indulgent to the Muse and Love;
Ye murmuring streams, that in meanders roll,
The sweet composers of the pensive soul!
Farewell!—The city calls me from your bowers:
Farewell, amusing thoughts and peaceful hours!"

EARLY on this fair morning the welcome sunlight is all around us—touching here and there on the red roofs half hidden among the willows and elms, making the old-fashioned inn and the ivied bridge quite picturesque, and striking into the clear water so that we can see shoals of small fish darting this way and that over the beds of green weed. And here is Miss Peggy—herself as radiant as the dawn; her eyes shining, and without malice; a placid content upon her tranquil lips.

"So this is the last day of our voyage?" she says.

"The last full day. We shall leave a few miles to do to-morrow, so as to get into Reading about noon."

"When one looks back," she says, rather pensively, "all those places we have seen appear to be very far away now. Doesn't it seem ages since we saw Windsor Castle, with the Royal standard high up in the pale blue sky? Do you remember the fearful rain at Oxford—and the floods ——"

"And Mr. A'Becket?—yes. Tell me, did you ever answer the letter he was so kind as to send you about the antiquities of Gloucester?"

"Well, I did not," she says hastily. "Don't you think

your wife will do that for me? She ought. The information was for the whole party."

"We shall be having some photographs of the boat done at Reading; you can send him one of those: that will square accounts."

"Do you remember the flooded Cherwell—and how the Banbury people helped us—and then those moonlight nights at Warwick, and the ghostly drive to Kenilworth? Then came the quiet meadows about Stratford ——"

"Yes; and the sudden appearance of Rosalind in a sitting-room of the Shakespeare Hotel ——"

She looks up quickly.

"You weren't reading your paper all the time?"

"Not all the time."

She laughs a little.

"I half suspected it. I was sure a man's curiosity would get the better of him. They talk about women! I thought you weren't so much taken up with politics. Well, what did you think of the performance?"

"I thought it was very clever—until you jumped behind the curtain, which Rosalind wouldn't have done. Rosalind wouldn't have been scared to death by a parlour-maid."

"I wonder who is likely to know most of what Rosalind would have done—you or I?" she says, saucily.

"To-night will be our last night on board. You must have the costume still with you. May we hope for a repetition?"

"Before Mr. Duncombe? My gracious, no!" she exclaims. "I shouldn't mind Colonel Cameron so much—for your wife went and told him all about it; but Mr. Duncombe —no."

"Why, what can it matter? If you have worn the costume at a fancy-dress ball ——"

"Yes; that's just where it is," she says. "You don't mind any sort of nonsense, if everybody else is in it. And I thought we *might* have some kind of masquerading, when

we got into the Forest of Arden; and that is why I brought the dress."

"And there was none?"

"No—for Colonel Cameron was with us then to keep us in order. Ah, well, I fancy a quieter mood was better fitted for those strange solitudes. Do you remember the night we sat outside in the starlight, listening to the nightingale—with the boat all lit up among the dark branches? If there are any ghosts in the Forest of Arden, they must have wondered what the fiery thing was, in among the willows. And all that, too, seems a long while ago, doesn't it?" she continues. "Do you remember the beautiful wood we rambled through on a quiet Sunday morning, just outside one of the tunnels? I suppose it must belong to somebody; but it looked to me as if no one had ever seen it before. Do you remember the primroses, and the wild hyacinths, and the red flower—what is it ——?"

"The campion."

"And then to leave all that beautiful place and the sunlight and go away into a black hole, scraping and tearing through the solid earth. We were getting used to the tunnels by that time I think; but the first one—the great long one—was just a little too dreadful. Do you remember the unearthly voice—

"'My father died a drunkard,
And I was left alone,'

and the small lamps far away in the darkness, and the red glow from the saloon showing us the rocky wall around us? I suppose if we *had* bumped hard against the side, it would have been Angel Gabriel for the whole of us. Then came the long sailing down the Severn—why, even that seems ages ago. I suppose it is because each day was so crowded with different experiences: one is so interested at the moment that you forget what has gone before—until one looks back. And there will be a great deal of looking back when once it is all over and we are in London again. It will be an occupation for many an evening—if you will allow me to come and see you sometimes."

"We will allow you to come and see us sometimes, if you are good."

"There is one thing," she resumes—as she is idly watching the small fish down in the clear deeps: "I have got to know something of what England is really like. I suppose when I hear people at home talking about their trip to England I shall be saying to myself, 'What, *you!*—you think you have seen England? You haven't at all! You have only seen railway-England!'"

"Then you are returning to America?" one observes casually.

"Why, of course, I must go back," she says; "but for how long is quite a different matter. I think my friends at Bournemouth must have had enough of me."

"There's a house in London where your presence might be tolerated—indeed, they might even pretend to welcome you. And as you are going to Scotland with us in the autumn, in any case, why make two bites of a cherry?"

"You are very kind; but I think it will have to be America first and Scotland afterwards," she makes answer; and here the subject drops; for Murdoch's silver tinkle summons us within.

At breakfast there was clearly a foreshadowing of the end; for already these good people were beginning to talk of the chief impressions produced by this long water-ramble of ours. Miss Peggy's fixed ideas seemed to be the remoteness and the silence of those solitudes through which we had passed, and the profusion of wild-flowers. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, on the other hand, had some fancy that in these rural wanderings you got to understand something of the hold that the Church of England has on the national mind—the prominence of it even in the landscape—the small, venerable, strong, square-towered building dominating the tiniest village, the great Cathedral the principal feature, and the proudest possession, of the town. These imaginings were vague, but we knew the sentiment that prompted them; and we knew that the importance accorded to the Church, whether in hamlet or in city, must have been

grateful to her heart. Jack Duncombe said that his chief recollection was of waking up among willow-branches and wondering what part of the world he was in; also that red blinds are capital things in windows, for they tell you in a moment whether there is sunlight outside or not; for the rest, he looked back upon a most judicious combination of exercise and idleness; and then he wound up with something very nice and appropriate about the companionship he had enjoyed, which was, no doubt, fully appreciated by his hostess and our pretty Peggy. Amid all these pleasant souvenirs, what was our surprise to find that Sir Ewen Cameron—the gentle Inverfask—alone was moved to rage and resentment!

"I don't mind owning it," said he, "but for the rest of my life I shall cherish an undying hatred of the cuckoo. It is a pity. You think of the cuckoo as the spirit of the woods—why, you might take it as the presiding genius of a trip like this. The beast! I never knew him before. In season and out of season—in the times of heaviest rain—when not another bird is astir—when everything else is as still as the grave—that fool of a fowl keeps calling away, with a persistency that is simply maddening. I shall never hear a cuckoo-clock without wanting to drive a charge of No. 4 shot through the works of it. I used to like the cuckoo. I would no more have dreamed of shooting one than of shooting a wren or a robin ——"

"Sir Ewen, you wouldn't shoot a cuckoo!' Mrs. Threepenny-bit cried.

"I won't say 'Yes,' and I won't say 'No,'" he answered darkly; "but it would be awkward for the cuckoo if it happened to come in the line of my gun. There's a blood-feud between us henceforth. Fortunately, I never heard of any cuckoo being in the Inverfask neighbourhood; so there won't be any temptation there."

This was a perfect day for the last. The overarching blue had not even a speck of cloud; the atmosphere was singularly clear and vivid; a fresh breeze tempered the heat of the sun,

and stirred the water into shining breadths of silver. Nor was there any want of exercise for those so inclined; for this Kennet and Avon Canal seems to have quite fallen out of use; and not only had we to open the locks and the swing bridges for ourselves, but these had grown so stiff that it was with the greatest toil and difficulty that we got through. Occasionally our man-power proved insufficient; dust and stones had soldered up the junction between the bridge and the roadway so that the former refused to move on its pivot; in which case we had to get a rope and affix it to the horse, and then with his hauling and our pushing the slow-creaking thing would begin to revolve—to the no small wonderment of the cottagers. As there was no one at all looking after the locks, in order to save time Jack Duncombe and Captain Columbus went on ahead to get them open for us; and as the Young Dramatist was rather fond of hard work, he had plenty of it over those rotten old gates and paddles. When they had got the lock ready, we could see them, a long way off, sitting in the sunlight—in their shirt-sleeves—awaiting us; and a rumour that subsequently prevailed, to the effect that Captain Columbus utilised these intervals of rest in "snatching" pike from among the reeds—by means of an unholy instrument that he possessed—is almost certainly groundless. At least we had no pike for dinner that evening.

Our route at first lay through a long stretch of level marsh-land bounded on the north by a range of hills, on the wooded slopes of which are set a series of noble mansions, but at such distances apart that no doubt each proud owner, girt about by his "policies," is monarch of all he surveys. As we glided along through the hawthorn-scented air, our chief difficulty was to tell whether we were on a river or a canal, for the Kennet and Avon Canal and the river Kennet intertwist themselves in a remarkable manner, and seem to have all their chief characteristics in common. Which was it—as we were getting on to Newbury—that showed us, through the pellucid water, large subaqueous forests of various hues of green, with prodigious numbers of good-sized perch hanging motionless—or

only moving a fin—until the prow of the Nameless Barge was almost on them, when they would make a sudden shoot out of danger? Miss Peggy was called to the bow of the boat to watch this performance. Fat fellows those perch were, with their striped sides and red fins; and mostly they lay in the clear spaces among the weeds, so that we could see them distinctly enough; nay, the wonder was that they were so long in seeing us, for again and again we seemed to be on the point of running down one of them, when the plump little water-zebra would make a sudden dart aside. It was rather pleasant to cleave through this transparent world of wonders—at least, Miss Peggy seemed to find it so. She was clinging to the iron rail at the edge of the house roof, so as to make sure she wouldn't go over; sometimes she hummed a bit of "Kitty Wells," but in no mournful mood; the sunlight twisted strands of gold among the soft brown of her hair; no doubt she felt the velvet-blowing breeze cool and fresh about her face. There was no need for all of us to be labouring away at those rotten old locks. Some people like gratuitous work, and no doubt it does them good. Even Sir Ewen Cameron, who was usually active enough, had not joined that volunteer brigade; he was sitting in the stern-sheets, talking to his hostess—and in a sufficiently serious manner. We did not know what he was consulting her about, and we did not care. We were bent on catching a perch asleep; and a hundred and a hundred times we were so nearly succeeding that it seems hard to call the result a defeat.

About mid-day we came in sight of Newbury, the pink houses of which looked very pleasant among the golden meadows and the various greens of poplar and maple. A brisk and lively little town we found it to be, and of much quaint picturesqueness in its setting and surroundings; and perhaps Queen Tita regarded it with all the greater favour that she was almost certainly ignorant of its ancient renown. For what would she have said if she had been told that a body of Newbury cloth-weavers had actually been audacious enough to march to Flodden Field? She would have indignantly denied

that it was by their ell-wands the "Flowers o' the Forest were a' wede away". As for the fighting in Charles's time, Newbury itself had probably but little to do with that: while the Newbury of to-day looks as if it never had much association with slaughter and bloodshed of any sort, so bright and cheerful is it, and so full of a business-like modern activity. Not that we lingered very long in the place after having paid a visit to the telegraph office and also made a few purchases. We returned to the Nameless Barge, which was attracting a vast amount of notice at the bridge, and had her pushed along into a place of quietude and privacy; then Columbus and the Horse-Marine were set free to seek out their mid-day meal and also provender for the horse; and then we assembled in the saloon, which was pleasantly cool after the glare of the sun in Newbury streets.

At lunch a very important matter came on for discussion: it was the question as to whether the bye-laws of the Kennet Conservancy Board could be held to be binding on a free-born citizen of the United States. The fact is, we knew that a little later on we should be in the immediate neighbourhood of some very famous stretches of trouting-water, if not actually passing through them. We had an American split-cane rod on board, with plenty of light tackle and small flies. We had also an American on board. We English folk would, of course, pay attention to the notice-boards describing the awful pains and penalties incurred by anyone found fishing in the preserved waters; but did these rules and regulations apply in the case of a foreigner? Mr. Duncombe, who was a Lawyer as well as a Dramatist and a Short-noticer, was distinctly of opinion that they did not apply. Colonel Cameron, on the other hand, held that it was of no consequence whether they did or not. A free-born American, he maintained, would naturally fish wherever he wanted to fish, and would never dream he was committing a crime; while to prosecute him for so doing would be to raise a grave international question on quite insufficient grounds. If the Kennet Conservancy Board (he said) were to drag the two nations into war over a matter of this kind, their

conduct would be severely animadverted upon by the newspapers. Mrs. Threepenny-bit pointed out that Peggy (if we were referring to her) could plead that she had never seen the notices in question; for an American—with experiences of advertisements displayed on every prominent feature of a landscape—instinctively and resentfully turns away from a board stuck up on a tree. The person at the head of the table wanted to know, as a matter of argument, what would be the result if the trout were consenting parties: if they only knew the chance held out to them, might they not gladly accept it, and take for their motto—"And Beauty draws us with a single hair"? Finally, Colonel Cameron went to a certain fishing-basket, and coolly brought forth therefrom a book of flies. Without more ado, he was going to teach Peggy—it appeared—to break the law, and put us all in peril of gaol.

We had a delightful stroll this afternoon along the banks of the winding water-way that is sometimes the canal and sometimes the Kennet, and sometimes both combined. The land in our immediate neighbourhood still continued marshy—here and there flushed pink with masses of ragged-robin; and occasionally there were nursery beds of watercress, with clear rills running through them. The river-side path was profuse with wild-flowers and long lush grass; and everywhere were hawthorn trees and hawthorn bushes smothered in bloom. A perfect silence prevailed over the wide, flat, swampy district, save for the cry of a startled peewit, or the distant soft tinkle of a sheep-bell. As to whether we paused at any point of our long ramble to allow our young American friend to try the split-cane rod, nothing shall be set down here: international complications should be studiously avoided.

As the mellow evening drew on apace, we began to think it was but little wonder the Kennet river was haunted by artists. To be sure, the country around seemed to us, who had been in more lonesome wilds, to have a kind of suburban look about it but then we were drawing near to civilisation and

the great highway of the Thames; while as for the Kennet itself, it seemed to woo the landscape painter at every sylvan turn. Just before we got to Aldermaston, we passed along and under a magnificent avenue of overbranching elms and ash and poplar; and the masses of foliage, rising far into the evening sky, were aglow in the now westering light. Aldermaston itself—or such outlying bit of it as was visible to us—had "F. Walker" written on every feature of it—the wide river, the shallow fords, the sandy banks, the trees and scattered cottages warmed by the quiet sunset radiance. When we got to our moorings for the night—under some tall larch-trees in private grounds, the owner of which was most courteous to us—there was the faintest touch of crimson low down in the west, and the pale crescent of the new moon hung in the golden-clear sky.

It was our last night on board; and yet it cannot be said we were a particularly mournful company. No; for in spite of all kinds of sinister warnings and prophecies—and in spite of difficulties that at the moment threatened to be insurmountable—we had brought our expedition to a successful issue; and all we had to do now was to celebrate our triumph by a little frolic at Henley, to aid in which a few innocent young creatures of both sexes had been summoned. But in the meantime we had to decide what was to be done with the Nameless Barge. To-morrow we should be back in the Thames again, at Reading. Should we take her down to Kingston, whence we had started, and find her quarters there? Or should we send her up the river to Henley, with a view to the forthcoming Regatta?

"I will settle that matter for you," said Colonel Cameron, as we sat at dinner. "Or rather, I have settled it for you. I am going to buy this boat."

"Really!" says one of us, who seems to think he might have been consulted.

"Yes," he continues, in a very cool manner; "and I will show you why. If you keep her at Henley or anywhere else on the Thames, you will be continually planning trips and

excursions, which will waste a great deal of your time. You will want to get value for your money. You would get value in one way; but not in another. She would be a standing temptation to you. Therefore I am going to buy the boat from you and take her away."

"But, Sir Ewen," Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaims in amazement, "what on earth could you do with a boat like this?"

"I will explain that to you," says this tall Highlander, with great equanimity. "Just below the belt of wood at Inverfask there is a quiet little bay, very fairly protected by rocks—in fact, close to the shore it is perfectly sheltered. I propose to anchor a buoy some way out, and have a wire rope connecting it with the land; then, you perceive, by means of a traveller, you could run this boat along whenever you wished; and you would be out at sea, safe and secure—a small floating home that would be very convenient for a hundred things. You might want to give your visitors afternoon tea. Or you might have a little dinner-party in the saloon, for the fun of the thing; I have secured Murdoch—he will be captain, cook, and steward. Or you might be quite by yourselves; and if it was a hot evening—and the midges troubling you on shore—you just step on board, and haul yourselves out to sea. Or again, supposing Mr. Duncombe were coming round that way—I hope he will—and wanted a quiet day's work done, wouldn't that be a secure retreat for him? There could be no better isolation, surely, or more perfect silence: that would be a place to write!"

"It sounds tempting, certainly," young Shakespeare made answer—perhaps with wistful visions of *not* absolute isolation floating before his mind.

"Of course, you would have to ask permission," Inverfask continued; "and not from me; it is not for myself I propose to make the purchase; it is to be a little present."

Why was it that all this time our pretty Peggy had been sitting with eyes downcast? Did she know of this audacious scheme; and could it concern her in any way?

"Then," said he, "when I have got possession of the boat —and I have shown you how absolutely necessary and reasonable it is that I should get possession of her—to hand her over, that is—then she will no longer be known as the Nameless Barge. Oh, no; when she is at her new moorings in the North we must find a proper name for her." He looked across the table (and Peggy's eyes were still downcast). "And do you know what I propose to call her?—Well, I have been thinking I could not do better than call her ROSALIND'S BOWER."

THE END.

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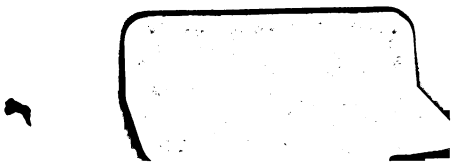
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